BRITISH COUNCIL

Crafting Futures Armenia

Making and Learning now: Craft Research

31 July 2022

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Executive summary

This study of the perspective of 56 craftspeople who have been involved in or exposed to informal learning, from all over Armenia reveals a sector in an extremely challenging economic situation due to both the covid-19 pandemic and the war. Craft work, business practices, economic situation, informal teaching and learning, environmental sustainability and the crafts people's own perceptions of their sector were explored.

The craft being produced is traditional in technique and style, evolving and sometimes becoming hybridised, but mostly building on an established idiom. There is a rich range of practices, largely practised by an ageing group, but with some interest from young people that can be nurtured. Craft has real cultural and social value for those involved, especially within family groups. The passion and enthusiasm of our respondents shows this. Using this social, long term and flexible approach within the formal education system may help to develop new craft makers with excellent technical and soft skills and provide a more flexible and creative learning and teaching environment. Promoting the continuation of informal learning is just as important, as it is not likely to be able to replicate all the benefits of learning within the family group.

Aside from the disruption of the pandemic and war, it is a sector that is growing overall. Many craftspeople are motivated by the quality of the work itself rather than developing a business which may in part account for the lack of adaptation in the face of the pandemic. This passive approach is not ideal if the aim is to develop a business. Peer Learning or mentoring might be a good approach to developing and advocating for business skills. Successful businesses have an important role to play in continuing craft practices.

Encouraging patronage in creative ways at home and abroad might be one way to improve the economic situation, as well as developing more knowledge and appreciation in members of the public. Promoting the *making* and collecting of craft as a positive, eco-friendly, culturally and socially responsible past time through knowledge.

The internet is being used more and more by some craftspeople, this is an area that could do with some more attention to support craftspeople to professionalise their online presence and to use it for their business, but on a simpler level it provides further opportunities for skills sharing and intergenerational learning.

While the economic situation is distressing, strengthening the craft community itself through opportunities to learn from one another and socialise will help build the camaraderie necessary to build resilience and maintain enthusiasm for craft.

Introduction

The British Council's Crafting Futures is a global programme which aims for a sustainable future through making and collaboration – supporting a future for craft by understanding its value in our history, culture and world today.

The programme brings together craft practitioners, designers and organisations from around the world to explore possibilities for this future together. In Armenia, Arts University Plymouth is working with a range of partners. For the research project this is the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography[1].

Crafting Futures is tailored to the needs of the local communities, and the British Council's inclusive approach means it is open to craft practitioners of any background in any location. In Armenia the overarching focus is on craft education. While part of the programme is focused on formal creative education for young people in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, there is a strong tradition of informal education in craft so we felt it was important to draw attention to and learn from this part of the sector within this research.

Both formal and informal education are important for the health of the sector. Craft production is important as both an economic and, perhaps more importantly, as a cultural activity for most of our respondents, and many others across Armenia. This report provides an overview of the craft sector in 2021, mainly from the perspective of informally educated craftspeople, who are often engaged in teaching others their craft. We hope this report will help to inform and enhance future educational and development initiatives. We also hope it will encourage intergenerational learning and expose more people to contemporary Armenian craft practices.

Weaving at the Telik Centre in Ijevan

[1] based on Grant agreement, partnership and/or collaboration 09052020 - 4, 12 June 2020

Research Team

- Dr Kim Bagley, Craft specialist and Making Futures Fellow at Arts University Plymouth, UK Academic lead for the project.
    - Questionnaire adaptation, data and response analysis, report writing, research assistant training.
- Ruzanna Tsaturyan, Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences, Armenia
    - Logistical and professional support for research assistants, collaboration with lead of the project on local settings, respondent shortlisting, questionnaire adaptation.
- Margarit Harutyunyan - Research Assistant
    - Participant selection, fieldwork research and response collection, data entry, questionnaire testing and review, photography
- Diana Hovhannisyan - Research Assistant
    - Participant selection, fieldwork research and response collection, data entry, questionnaire testing and review, photography

With thanks to Narek Tovmasyan, Arts Manager, British Council for support and facilitation and to Ashkhen Khudaverdyan, Senior Enterprise Specialist, My Armenia Program for an online workshop for research assistants sharing good practice in fieldwork and sharing details of the MyArmenia program.

The precedent and purpose for this study

This study is to an extent modelled on the Study of the Traditional Crafts Sector in Georgia conducted by the Georgian Arts and Culture Centre in 2012. The new study is smaller in scale. The focus is on Armenian crafts, addressing informal teaching and learning, the development of the sector, and the sustainability of the sector.

The purpose of the study is to learn more about the sector, specifically about those crafts people who are engaged in informal and intergenerational learning, to inform further research and development initiatives and to create an impression of the sector for future reference. This study is aimed at development agencies, governmental agencies and education providers but may be of interest to all who are involved in or interested in the craft sector or craft education sector in Armenia. Questions focused on the following areas:

- The craft work itself
- Learning (informal, and intergenerational)
- Teaching (informal, and intergenerational)
- Income and growth
- The impact of the covid-19 pandemic
- The craft making space and habits of craftspeople
- Internet use

- Environmental sustainability
- Perceptions of the sector by the craftspeople themselves.

The impact of the current pandemic situation on craft practice is also recorded, as well as building a general picture of what craft is being made, how it is being made and how it can be described.

Methods and Collection Process

The study collected primary data through a detailed questionnaire with a sample of 56 people who are craftspeople. They were selected because they have engaged in informal learning and/or teaching. The list of respondents was initially generated using prior knowledge of the partners involved, word of mouth and knowledge of existing initiatives such as the MyArmenia programme, with further screening undertaken by the research assistants to arrive at the final participant group, aiming for a range of traditional practices and ages.

Crafts people were included who had experience of professional development programmes and initiatives, as well as those who did not. The sample is a representative (though imprecise) cross-section of crafts people working in Armenia who have engaged in informal intergenerational knowledge transfer or who are self-taught and engaged in traditional craft practices.

The questions were asked verbally and questionnaires were completed by the research assistants who were able to provide clarity and conversation leading to full responses. Photo and video documentation was recorded by the research assistants which provides further detail on work and sales spaces, craft practice and materials. All respondents consented to the use of their information and images. Demographic data and personal information was collected, but this data is anonymised for reporting purposes. Within the report respondents are referred to by their craft profession and regional location. This is to protect their anonymity and is in no way meant to deny their individual authorship of their practice. Photographs of work are attributed to the craftsperson by name.

The two research assistants were trained online in good fieldwork practice by Dr Kim Bagley of Arts University Plymouth in advance of the fieldwork process and ethical clearance was sought at the University. Ruzanna Tsaturyan supported the research assistants in Armenia with her knowledge of Armenian craft practices and extensive local fieldwork experience, her prior research and with her networks. The research team reviewed the research questionnaire together to ensure local applicability and appropriateness of the questions asked before fieldwork commenced. The questionnaire was initially tested and then slightly adjusted for further interviews. The research assistants translated the responses from Armenian into English for analysis.

Fieldwork was undertaken in Summer 2021 observing government protocols in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Carved relief by Grigor Hovsepyan

Limitations

Though a substantial number of respondents were included, the study is limited by the sample size. Though it is significant and likely representative of the sector, it does not cover all professionals. Yerevan was included, and represents the largest number of respondents from a single geographic area, reflecting population density. While the questionnaire was lengthy, and range of topics covered was extensive, the overall scale of the study meant that it did not cover any single issue in detail. Working in an interdisciplinary, international team brought a range of perspectives, but it is acknowledged that the author of this report is an English-speaking academic without insider cultural knowledge and limited first hand cultural experience. Reporting and analysis is therefore tentative, and seeks to use the (translated) responses of the respondents themselves where possible. The remaining members of the research team are Armenian, with first hand cultural and language experience, yet are still outsiders in many of the craft communities where they undertook research.

This research and report does not include information about state policy in relation to craft. Consequently we are unable to recommend interventions based on policy.

Each respondent is an individual with their own hopes, fears, and emotions in relation to their practice and the world around them. Their response to the study comes from this perspective and will naturally include individual biases, and some apparent contradictions in the data. These

do not invalidate the study, but rather give it a sense of humanity - an important element of craft practices. The study primarily gathers the craftspeople's own perspectives.

Khachkar in the workshop of Ruben Nalbandyan

Demographics of respondents

56 professional crafts persons in Armenia were interviewed by two research assistants. 23 women and 33 men were interviewed. Women are over represented in textile crafts and men in metalwork, ceramics and woodwork. All respondents identified their nationality as Armenian, apart from one, who listed their Assyrian heritage. Four respondents were Armenians from Syria, now resident in Armenia.

Age

The average age of respondents was 50 years old, median age is 48 years. The oldest recorded respondent was 76 and the youngest 17. The length of respondents' careers in crafts was recorded. Many respondents, particularly older respondents, began their craft practice in childhood, with some very long careers of over 50 years recorded, with the longest career being over 60 years. This does suggest an ageing workforce, but because the inclusion criteria expected professional engagement and skill, this may not be the case across the sector; mastery takes time. This study mostly looks at the perspectives of mature and established professionals.

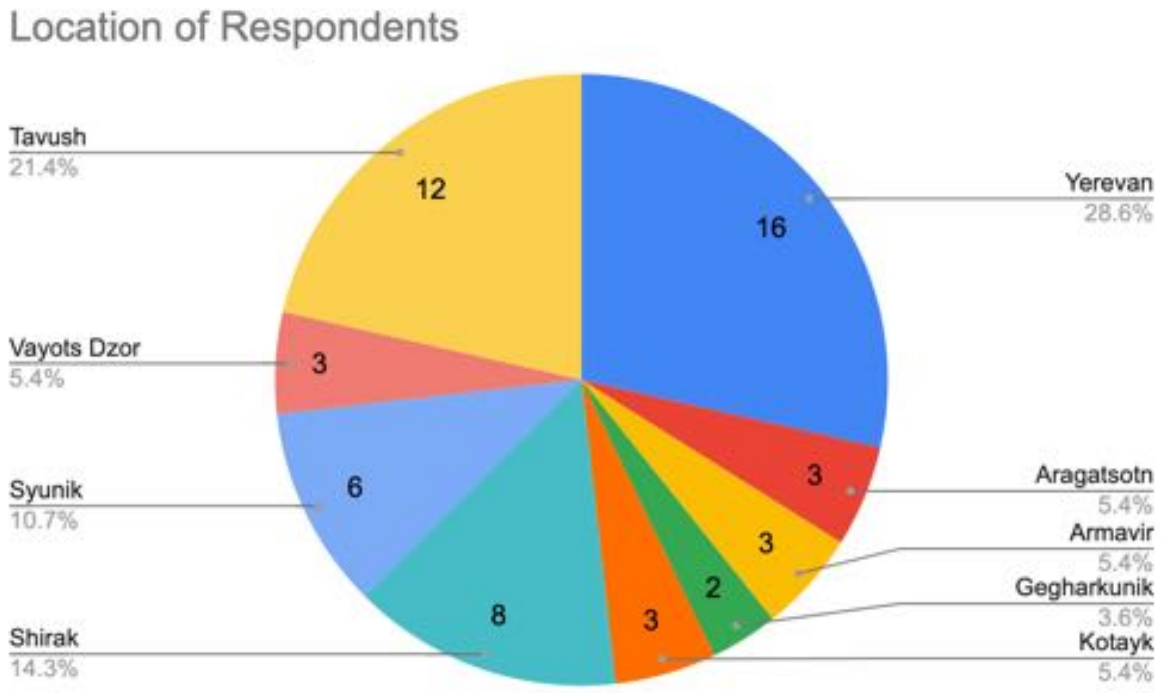
Formal and Semi-formal Education and training

The youngest respondent was a student at Terlemezyan State College of Fine Arts in Yerevan where craft skills are currently taught to teenagers from across the country. 20 of our respondents had participated in training or development projects related to their practice or business. 36 had not. 15 respondents across a range of practices were participants specifically in the USAID/Smithsonian MyArmenia programme[2] (MAP). While this is not a demographic characteristic, we observed a marked difference in the responses from respondents associated with this programme when compared to the other respondents so their experience is worth noting within this study, and is mentioned as appropriate throughout this report. Programmes like this form part of the professional development opportunities available to those educated informally. See the Teaching and Learning section for more details on both formal and informal learning, and the interest of young people in the craft practices of our respondents.

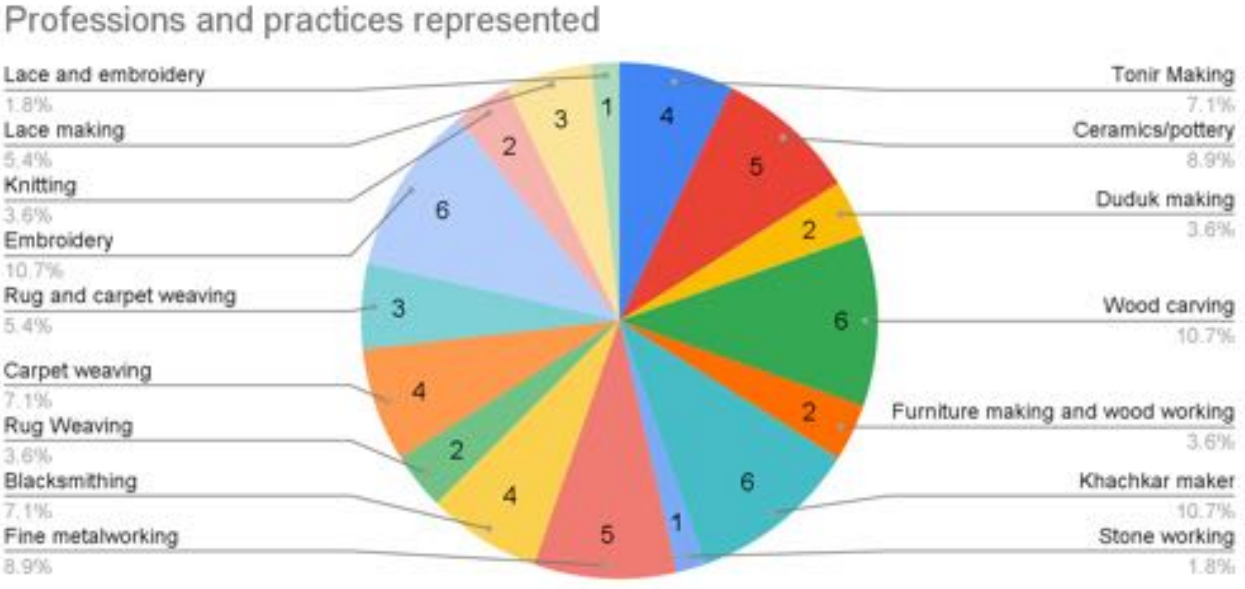
Location

Respondents' locations included the city of Yerevan (16 respondents) and 8 regions. Regions included Aragatsotn (3 respondents), Armavir (3 respondents), Gegharkunik (2 respondents), Kotayk (3 Respondents), Shirak (8 respondents), reflecting the importance of Gymri as a centre for craft, Syunik (6 respondents), Tavush (12 respondents), reflecting the importance of Dilijan and Ijevan, and Vayots Dzor (3 respondents).

[2] The My Armenia Program is funded by USAID and implemented by the Smithsonian Institution. It ran from 2016 - 2021 and was a community-based tourism development programme, working with Armenian crafts people.



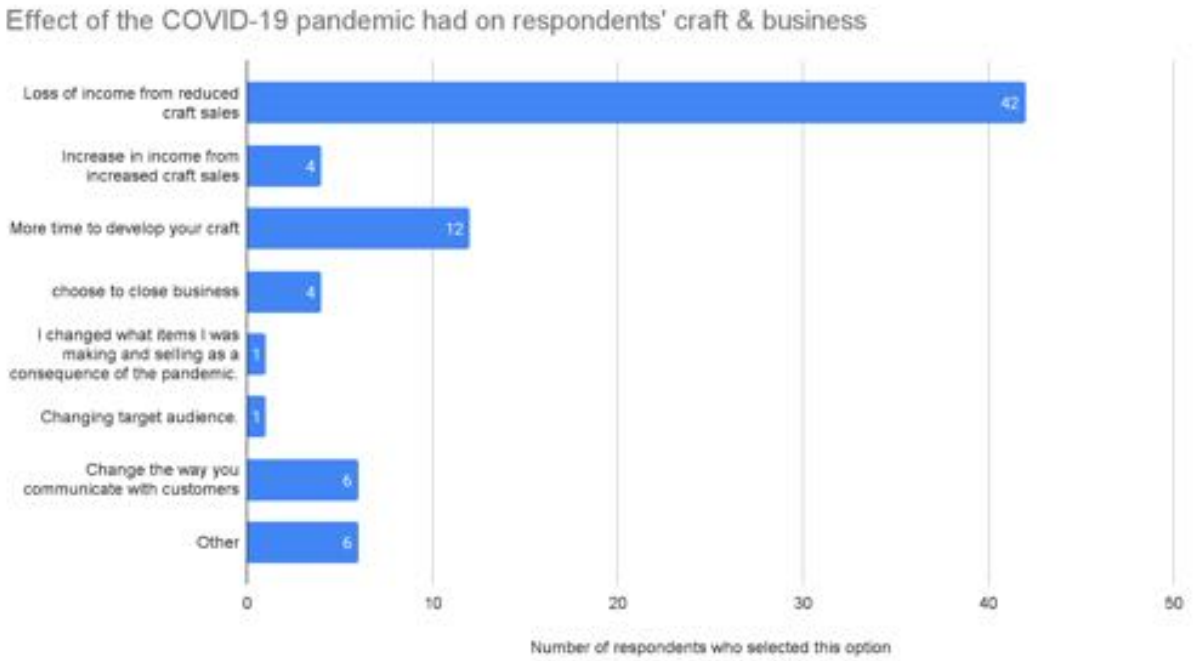
The range of professions or material specialities represented is wide, with just less than half working with textiles (lace, embroidery, knitting, rug and carpet weaving) and the remaining respondents working with hard materials: metal, wood, ceramics and stone. This broadly correlates with the gender of respondents, with women more likely to engage in textiles practices. Mushurba making (1), repousse and chasing (1), jewellery making (1), goldsmithing (1) and silversmithing(1) were grouped into one category, fine metalworking, for the chart below, for simplicity and due to similarity in scale and general crossovers in object making and technique. For example, a Mushurba maker will make jewellery and other fine metal objects, and have general silversmithing skills. In general, it is common for crafts people to practice more than one related craft such as knitting and embroidery, so these categories are indicative.



The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the War

This research was undertaken during the covid-19 pandemic and after the 2020 war with Azerbaijan over Artsakh/Nagorno Karabakh. While we did not question respondents specifically about the war, it did come up in many responses, demonstrating the impact on people's lives and livelihoods, including their craft practices. Several Khachkar makers noted sadly that they had many more requests for work (for example memorials or gravemarkers) as a consequence, particularly of the war, but also the pandemic. Maranci (2018: 202) observed the continued importance of the Khachkar in expressing Armenian cultural heritage in modern Armenia from its initial emergence as a creative form in the 9th century AD, this continues to be the case. Both the war and pandemic have had a negative effect on tourism which directly supports many crafts people who earn their primary living from their craft.

It was impossible to ignore the impact of the pandemic on our respondents, and an opportunity to capture its effects. While the pandemic came up in many answers to our questions, we asked one specific question about the impact of the pandemic on our respondents' craft practices. The impact on income is overwhelmingly negative, with 42 respondents saying that they had a loss of income as a consequence of the pandemic, with 4 choosing to close their business temporarily. A much smaller number (4) had an increase in sales, and each of these is linked to increased online sales. 3 out of 4 of these respondents were involved with the MAP, which taught business, marketing and internet skills to craftspeople, suggesting that these skills may have been a contributing factor to their success during this difficult period. 12 respondents indicated that they had more time to develop their practice. It is surprising that only 6 respondents changed the way they communicated with customers as a consequence of the pandemic.



While reduction in income is to be expected considering the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, with its truly global impact and governmental restrictions, it is nevertheless surprising and worrying that there was limited adaptation evident from respondents more than one year into the pandemic, and potentially facing a global economic recession.

Craft Work, including business practices of respondents

This section establishes the characteristics of craft production undertaken by the respondents, including what they are making, how they are making it and what its visual and materials characteristics are. It also captures changes in the recent past including the effect of the pandemic and war. Day to day aspects of running a craft business are also explored, including stock management, quality control and sales locations. Most respondents do sell their work, though a small number of respondents do not. For example, one is a young college student still learning, one has made a choice to make purely for pleasure and a couple more no longer sell their work due to age, health or by personal choice. While the cultural value of craft practices and its value to the individual maker is arguably more important than its economic value, because most of our respondents earn a living from their craft, it is tied to their physical livelihood, and sense of self, and potentially has an impact on their motivation to pass on their skills to others. There are also a number of development initiatives aimed at craftspeople with their livelihood in mind that have emerged in Armenia, often linked with tourism, so better understanding the economic value of craft works, and the benefits to individuals is intertwined with the landscape of contemporary craft in Armenia and therefore with informal learning.

Carved bottles by Armen Ohanyan

Materials, Techniques and Products

Respondents briefly described their materials and techniques as follows which generally follow what is expected in these craft practices. These are recorded here to give context to this research. Other literature is available that details material and technical aspects of these crafts more generally.

Ceramics/Pottery
Respondents making ceramics typically use potter's wheels and handbuilding techniques. Some use slip, glaze or other forms of decorative pigment to make their ceramics. Outputs tend to be functional, for example, dishes and jars. Two respondents use milk and fat, this may be for polishing or lubrication purposes. Clay collection from particular areas, such as Sisian was mentioned.

Tonir Making
Tonirs are made using clay, largely using the human body, particularly hand and feet ('trampling'), though one respondent who has branched out from traditional bread tonirs to make ovens to cook other types of food has partly mechanised their process.

Duduk Making
Duduk is a traditional musical instrument, made from wood, especially apricot, along with reeds.

Woodwork: Wood carving and furniture making
Wood carving, as a practice in itself, is often combined with furniture making and other wood working, such as joining, by our respondents. Popular woods include apricot, and there is a strong tradition of decorative carving. Some makers used cane or reeds too. Some combine with stones or other materials. Techniques may include carving and engraving. Typical objects made may include tables and other furniture, clocks and souvenirs.

Khachkar making and other stone carving
Cross-stone carving is undertaken by hand, with hand tools (hammer and chisel or other cutting tools), using different stones available, especially Tuff. Marble, basalt, felsite are also mentioned by respondents, who tend to make cross-stones and other objects such as statues. One mentioned gypsum.

Marash Embroidery by Aida Sanduryan

Lace
Lacemakers use thread and yarn, including cotton, synthetic and silk threads. Some of the lace makers practice other textile crafts such as embroidery, knitting and tailoring. One respondent mentioned that lacemakers usually use one colour, though they chose to use both white and beige, differentiating themselves from others. Tools include needles and scissors, and hands. Our respondents made handkerchiefs, tablecloths, pillows, diapers and other objects.

Knitting
This involves wool yarn, and is sometimes combined with embroidery techniques.

Embroidery
Embroiderers use needles to work on different cloths using threads made from cotton, silk, gold, and other metals. Base cloths vary, for example cotton, flax (linen), velvet, silk, and leather. Some include

additions such as natural pearls and beads. Traditional techniques were named by respondents including named Armenian techniques such as Urfa, Marash, Arabkir, Constantinople, Aintap, Van and Svas, as well as techniques associated with other places ('non-Armenian techniques'), though these may be used with recognisable Armenian designs. Embroiderers make many different textile products such as tablecloths, tote bags, jewellery, and Christmas tree decorations. As with lace making, these respondents tend to practise other textile crafts including carpet weaving, puppet and doll making and lace making.

Ani Umrshatyan at her loom with hand spun yarn

Rug weaving
Wool and cotton threads are used. Some respondents spin their wool by hand and some dye them using natural materials to produce natural colours using for example onion, nuts and apple skin to achieve different colours. Rugs are woven by hand and using knives, chisels, combs, scissors and weaving benches.

Carpet making/weaving
Tools and materials are similar to rug weaving. Wool and cotton threads are used for this and some respondents use natural dyes and hand spinning to prepare their materials. Some respondents mentioned the two-sided weaving technique. Knotting techniques are employed.

Blacksmithing
Blacksmiths used a variety of metals including iron, copper, brass and aluminium. Products produced include benches, agricultural tools, doors and gates. Blacksmiths use hand tools, such as various hammers, to manipulate the material while it is heated, using coal or electricity as an energy source for furnaces. They also typically used machines, for example, welding machines.

Mushurba making, fine metalsmithing and jewellery
Metalsmiths engaged in fine work use a variety of metals such as copper, brass, silver, melchior[3] and gold. Some use precious and semi-precious stones. Corresponding skillsets are known as silversmithing, goldsmithing and coppersmithing. They can include chasing and repousse amongst many other techniques, as well as the making of specific objects such as the Mushurba.

[3] An alloy of copper and nickel

Mikhail Sadoev at the lathe at his workshop in Yerevan

Categorising craft work

We asked respondents to describe their designs and their techniques as Traditional, Contemporary, Mixed (both traditional contemporary) or Other. Contemporary is here understood as an aesthetic style rather than time. Traditional is seen as a neutral term. Though it is sometimes considered static or pejorative, this is often not useful in studying craft, which tends to value tradition and considers it evolutionary. Ziemer[4] (2020, 7) eloquently explains that 'for a community or nation, the notion of tradition can embody an expression of survival and order, thus becoming a key stronghold for national belonging in times of uncertainty.' Design refers to shapes, forms, choice of colour, motifs, patterns or other visual elements. Techniques refer to the way work is made. Considering that craftspeople often design through making, it is acknowledged that especially in some crafts, the two elements can be quite difficult to separate and that these categories can be an imprecise way of describing work, that has limits to its usefulness. However, it does give us a general sense of how craftspeople see their work in relation to past practices, cultural identities and contemporary trends and attempts to separate technical and aesthetic elements to see if they are perceived differently.

Design

Just over half described their designs as traditional (30), and approximately one third (17) described their designs as mixed, showing traditional designs are most prevalent but not completely dominant. Some mentioned a particular regional or national style such as 'Old Gymri' style blacksmithing, or a rugmaker noting that their work is purposefully traditional

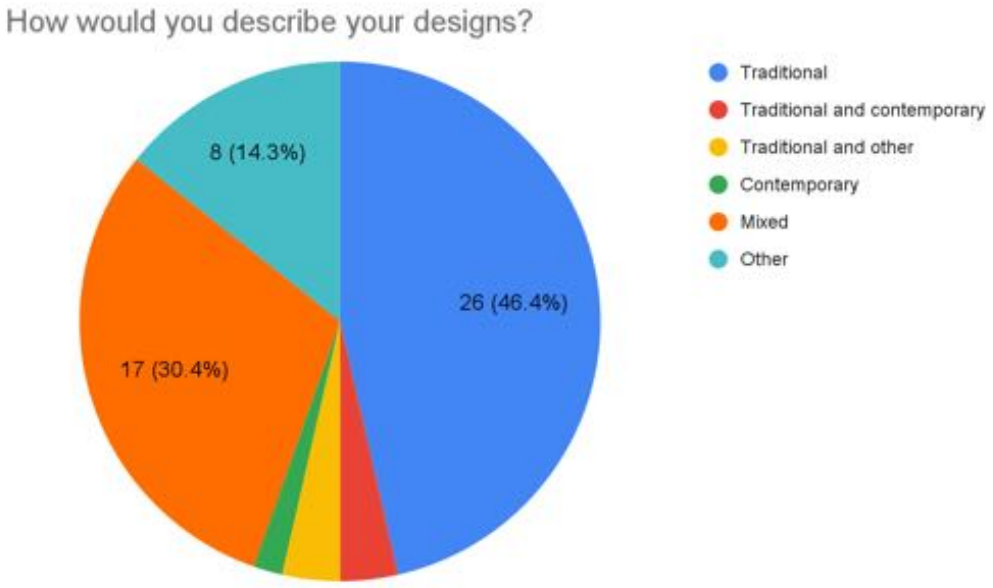
[4] This comment is made in relation to gender roles in the soviet and post-soviet South Caucasus, but can similarly be observed in relation to craft production that purposefully and consciously expresses its cultural origins.

because this must be saved from destruction. Only 1 described their work as only exclusively contemporary. In line with global scholarship, there was a sense that traditional is regarded as living and evolving, exemplified in the following comment from a respondent who described their designs as traditional: ‘everything is changing. Just imagine 300 tourists from different places come here every day. Of course we learn new things due to them as well’. Another described their work as ‘based on traditional’ and another as ‘more updated’. One described his tonir designs as traditional, but sometimes he makes his own innovations to suit current lifestyles and tastes, making tonirs suitable for cooking other foods such as lahmajo, pizza, Georgian puri and barbeque.

Salt container by Vahagn Hambardzumyan

Where respondents selected ‘other’ responses varied. Some referring to traditional aesthetics with a contemporary application or a deviation in their own design style in relation to their customer’s requests. One respondent gave a detailed categorisation of their work, demonstrating a complex understanding and articulation of aesthetics: ‘one category of work is traditional designs with the same accuracy, the second is only preserving some traditional details and giving way to their own visions, and the third is totally new, modern designs.’ Another respondent told us that they use Armenian designs with non-Armenian colours. Another two mentioned abstraction. A blacksmith indicated that designs depended on customers’ taste. It is worth noting that the most complex articulation of design elements came from three participants in the MAP.

For one ceramicist who described their work as mixed, they mentioned that they generally improvise but use a traditional style if their orders demand it. A woodcarver described their designs as ‘my own idea’.



Technique

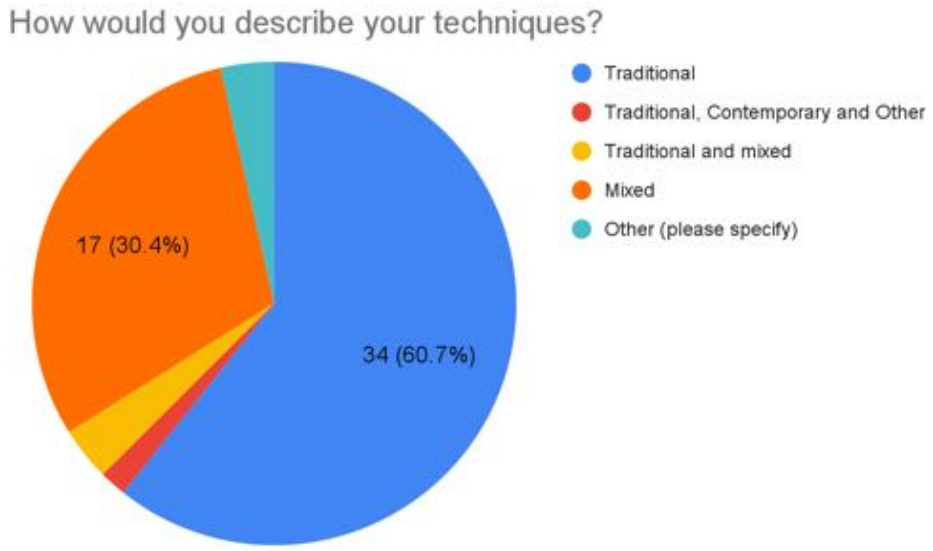
Considering technique, traditional was the most popular choice (37 respondents in total). 17 (or one third) selected mixed. Only one respondent considered their techniques to be contemporary, but that was selected along with both ‘traditional’ and ‘Other’.

Craft practices included in this study can to an extent be defined by the continuity of traditional techniques. Techniques are largely considered to be received rather than invented, whilst designs appear more subject to more invention or innovation. A knitter mentioned using her mother’s knitting needles. A blacksmith said ‘Every blacksmith must have a hammer and a fork’. A khachkar maker said: ‘we don’t invent anything new, the idea of the hammer has been around for a long time, it has 2 choices: murderer or khachkar maker’. Embroiderers mention specific techniques such as Armenian Aintap or blanket embroidery. The embroiderers in particular seem particularly interested in naming specific traditional techniques.

Exceptions include another blacksmith (from the MAP) who sometimes creates their own techniques for special works, as does a wood carver. Another wood carver began with traditional techniques but now ‘follows trends’. An embroiderer mentions that they also use both Armenian and non-Armenian traditional techniques.

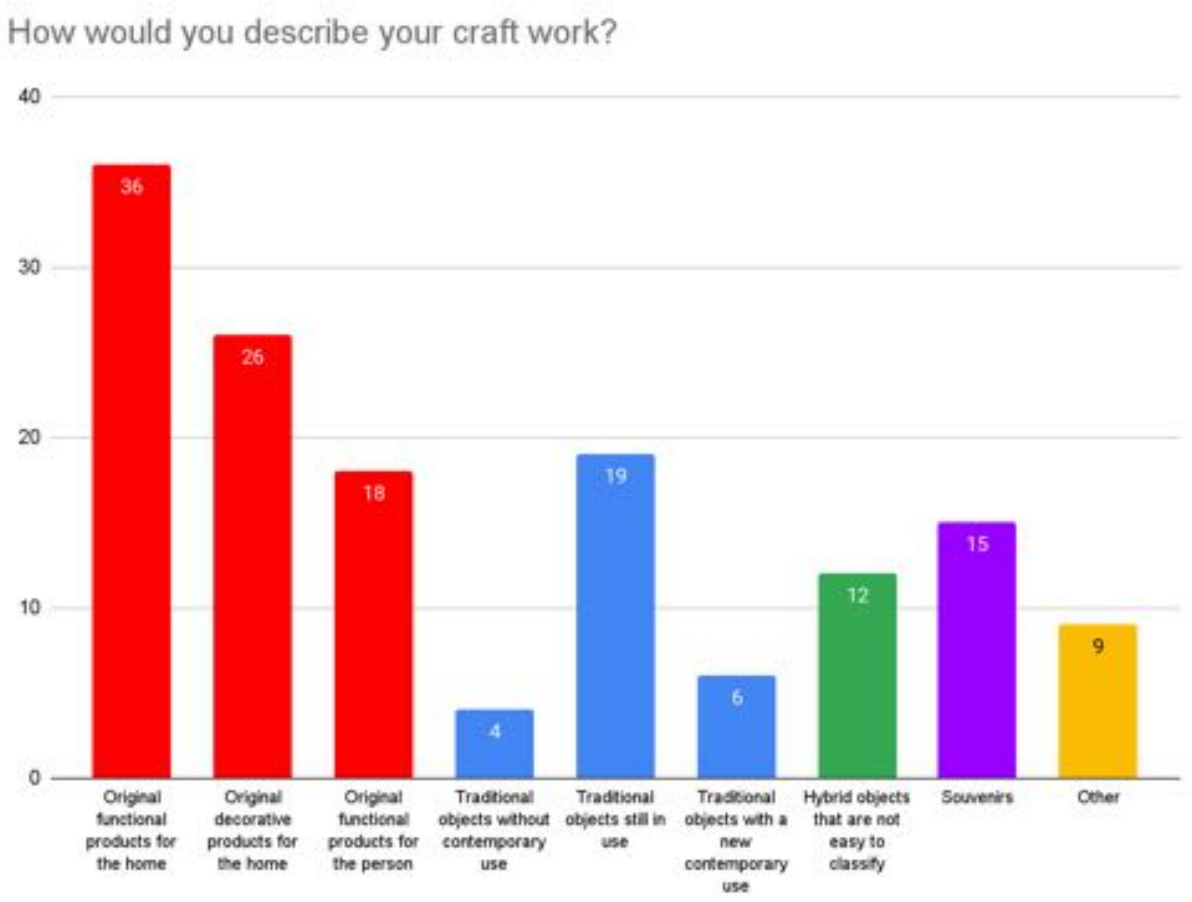
Two makers link technique choice to orders (an embroiderer and a khachkar maker).

The innovative tonir maker described in the previous section considers his techniques to be traditional but ‘some nuances are new’ referring to the mechanisation of part of his process. A goldsmith’s techniques depend on ‘the complexity of the case’.



Respondents also categorised their products into object types, selecting all relevant categories. Souvenirs were afforded their own category to differentiate them from other functional or decorative products, and are made by 15 respondents. Categories included functional and decorative products for the home, wearable/carryable objects such as clothing or jewellery, and traditional objects, which could be described as ‘in use’ in the same way they may have been in the past eg a tonir for cooking lavash, or having a ‘new use’ such as a traditional form used for storage or drinking, which is now used as a vase, or traditional objects that are no longer normally in use, and are likely to now be used for decoration, or which serve a nostalgic purpose. These answers give us insight into how craft practices could be marketed or presented, for example within the interior design or fashion contexts.

Functional products are most popular - with ‘original functional products for the home’ selected by 36 respondents and traditional objects still in use by 19 respondents. 26 make decorative products for the home. Traditional objects that have lost or changed their use over time are least popular. One woodcarver mentioned making Daghdghans, a type of amulet, though their original use is now lost. Outside of the personal and domestic sphere, respondents mentioned ecclesiastical objects (e.g. embroidery), and orders for events such as birthdays, or for more architectural and public spaces such as monuments and cemeteries (in the case of khachkar makers). A blacksmith makes objects for different industries or other crafts, including for construction, agricultural machinery and even parts for hinges. At least 9 respondents mentioned that the products they make are determined by orders from customers; customisation and the bespoke being easy to accommodate in small scale production.

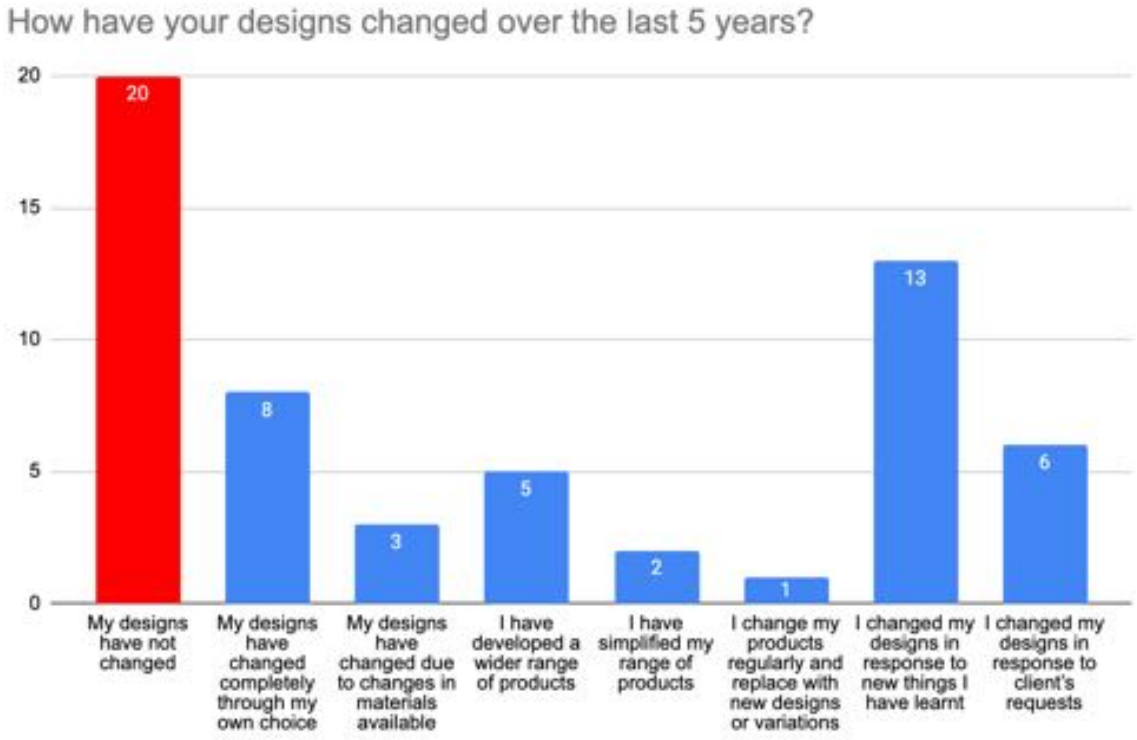


Change, adaptation and innovation

Respondents were asked about changes to designs and techniques over the last 5 years. The purpose of this time frame was to get a sense of change over a period longer than the covid 19 pandemic. The responses are fairly mixed. For 20 respondents, their designs have not changed. This means that 64% (36) of respondents have changed their designs in some way. The most popular reason for changes to designs is in response to learning new things (13 respondents). Material availability has only had an impact on the designs of 3 respondents, demonstrating that change is generally active and evolutionary rather than forced upon these craftspeople by external conditions.

In contrast to design, regarding techniques, 41 respondents said they have not changed their technique in the last 5 years. Only 3 have implemented new things they have learnt. Overall, there is a sense that once the relevant techniques are established and mastered, there isn't much reason to change, rather just to improve and consolidate, building on ways of working that

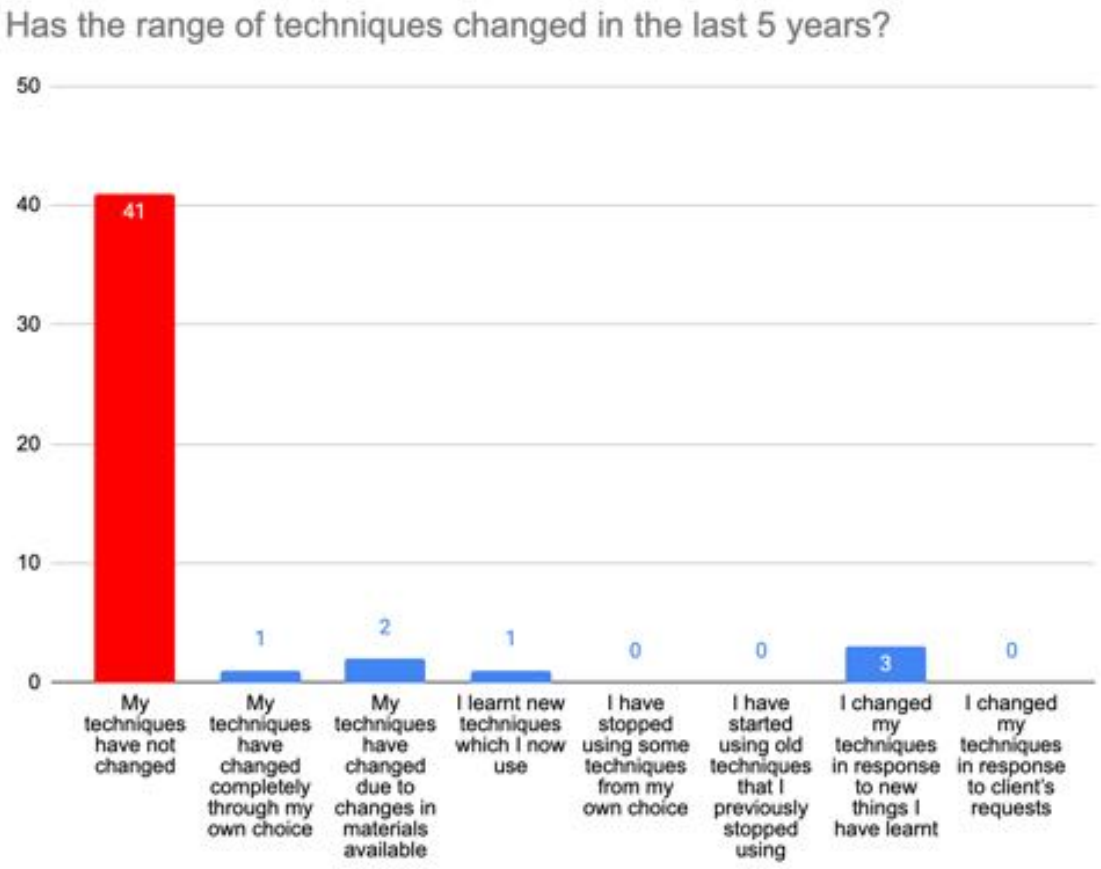
have remained fairly similar for centuries[5]. 5 respondents said they have acquired new tools or machines to improve their work rather than learnt new techniques.



For one wood carver, it depends on the individual project. For an embroiderer, 'there cannot be any change, cross embroidery stays the same, you just zoom in or zoom out crosses, change the proportions and their combinations'.

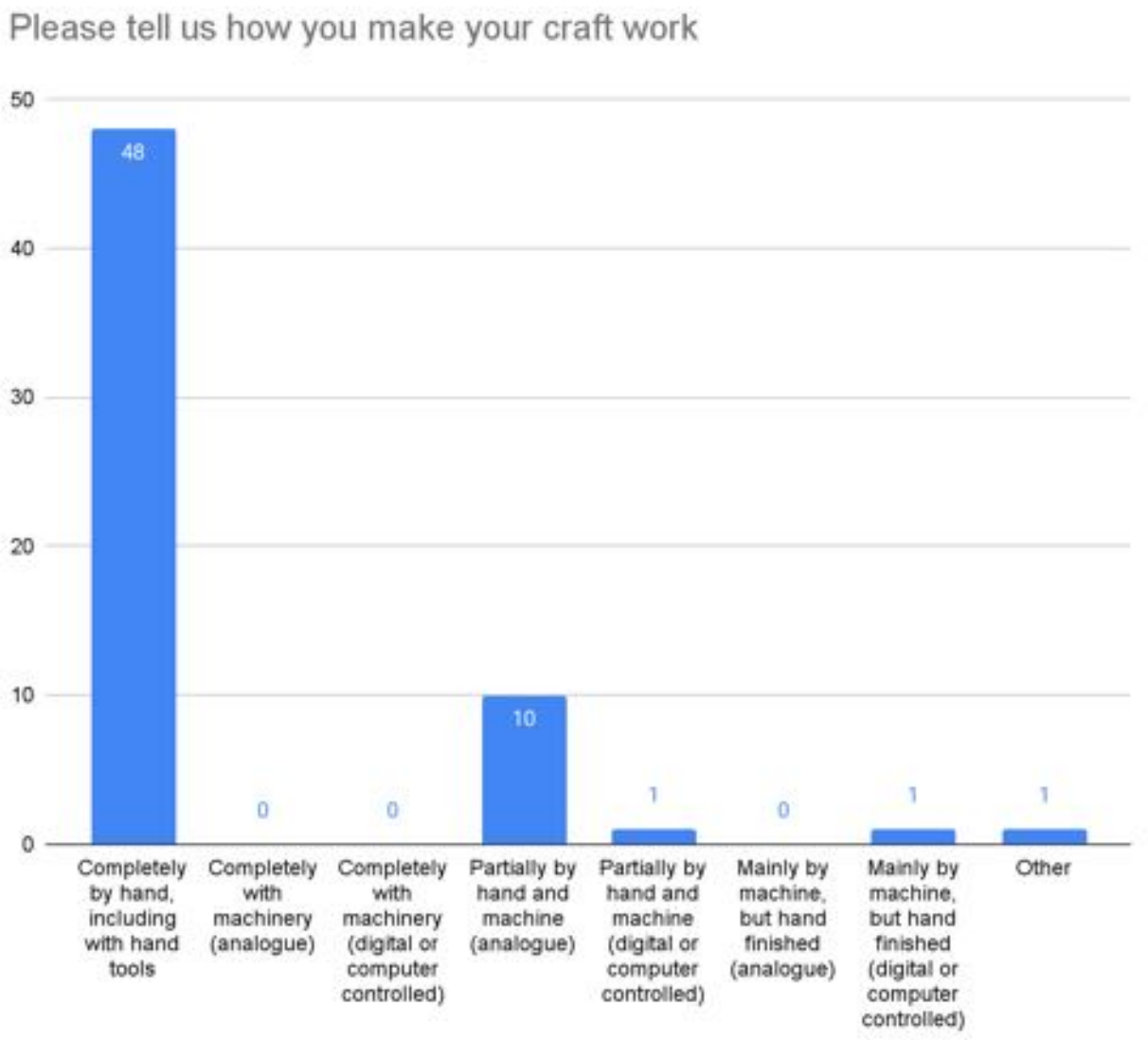
Looking at technique more broadly, one ceramicist the technique of material preparation has changed; they have begun to take materials from the mountains (see next section). One furniture maker reported that wood is now difficult to find, much more so than 10 years ago. Two textile makers have begun to combine techniques not usually or traditionally used together. A rugmaker is combining carpet and rug making techniques while an embroiderer combines carpet making with embroidery. Both these makers were part of the MAP. A goldsmith mentioned computer modelling and how he now uses it a lot.

[5] Khachkar making for example emerged in the ninth century (Maranci 2018), but stone carving in general has an ancient history. Needle lace making is likely more than 3000 years old (Kasparian 1983, 35)



As one may expect, the majority of respondents make their work by hand (including with hand tools), 13 use their hands as well as machinery. This includes sewing machines, lathes, milling machines and potter's wheels, kilns and other conventional equipment. One respondent said they use digital or computer-controlled machinery. However, it is clear that hand-making dominates and perhaps even defines craft production in Armenia. One respondent working with wood said that they buy premade objects which they engrave (common practice in souvenir production in many places), but mostly the craftspeople we spoke to are involved as individuals through the whole making process. Some mentioned that part of that process involves preparing materials from scratch such as collecting and processing clay or spinning and dyeing their own wool, though these makers are in the minority.

CAD (computer-aided design) and CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) is used alongside analogue and hand-making processes in some craft practices globally. While 49 respondents (87.5%) are aware of CAD/CAM technologies, only 5 are making use of this in their work. This includes two embroiderers who laser cut metal, wood and fabric to make mixed media products. For a very small number, they see the potential: a retired woodworker, who previously did everything by hand enthused that they would try such tools now if they were still practising, and a carpet weaver indicated their intention to do so in the future. A goldsmith, previously mentioned, uses 3D modelling to help with accuracy, especially in stone setting. A carpet weaver uses it for patterns, as part of restoring old designs. In these examples such technologies are seen as tools relevant to a continuing, improving practice.



A few others stated the case against CAD/CAM. For these artists, a choice to make entirely by hand, or in an analogue manner is an active choice, and even a purposeful safe-guarding of their conception of traditional craft. For one rug weaver: ‘ even maps (templates) for rugs aren’t useful for me. If you’re weaving by map it means you aren’t a good weaver. Also, two sides of the rug must be asymmetric, that means a lot, that indicates the rug is made by hand.’

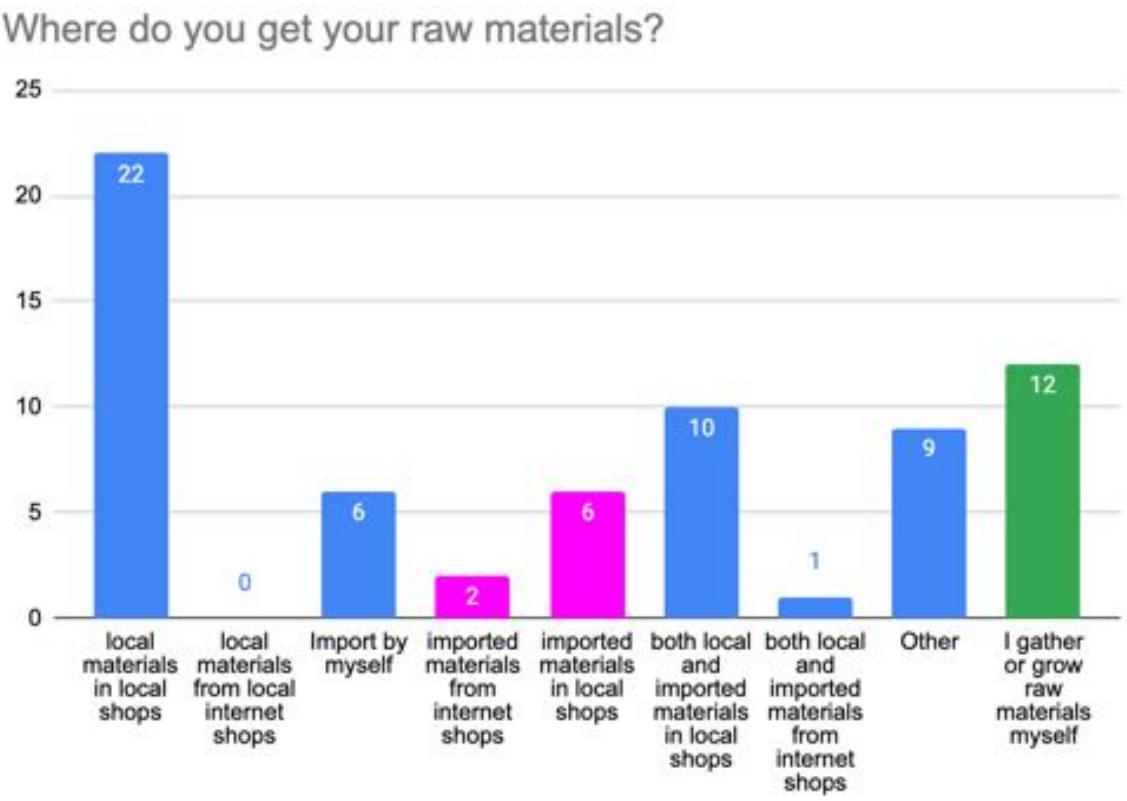
‘it is likely that the handiwork will disappear’

‘I wouldn’t like it, I prefer handmade’

‘I have no need for that. That hasn’t been expedient up to now.’

‘I principally don’t use that, and I don’t accept’.

Material Sourcing

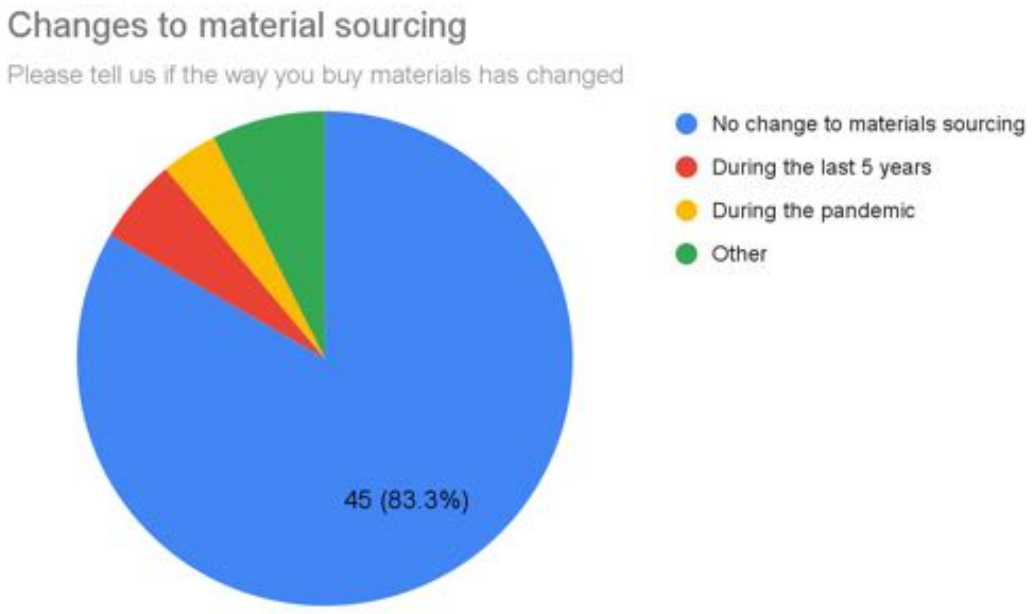


Materials are sourced in many different ways and in many combinations shown in the graph above, and dependent on the type of material. About half use local shops (32 respondents or 57%), with those living in smaller villages travelling to larger centres. A significant proportion (19 respondents or 33%) use imported materials and are therefore susceptible to the challenges associated with this such as supply chain issues, tax and other associated costs. Respondents mentioned wool from Europe, threads from Russia, Greece, Lebanon and Syria, glaze and ceramic materials from Ukraine, Russia and Iran. A smaller, yet still significant proportion gather or process their own materials, such as clay or wool. For certain materials, sourcing does not involve traditional or online retail. For example those working with stone may get their materials directly from mines, abandoned mines or from factories, in both cases generally seeking relatively small quantities that might be considered waste and offcuts of other industries. Weavers may buy wool from farmers if they process it themselves, some ceramicists and tonir makers gather clay locally and one wood worker collects wood himself from forests. Two respondents mentioned customers bringing them material to work with (wool and wood).

Only a few source materials via online retailers. For those who source materials online, 3 respondents mentioned ‘Amazon or other large international retailers’. Two respondents mentioned list.am. A goldsmith mentioned that they don’t trust online retailers as they need to appraise the materials personally. This points to the importance of considering local shops and markets, and importation that supports individual makers and small businesses, reducing barriers wherever possible.

When asked if the way they buy materials has changed, only 3 said it had changed in the last 5 years, and 2 said it had changed during the pandemic. 45 said they had no change to materials sourcing. It is not clear whether makers have had any choice in this. Despite these answers, changing global circumstances has had an impact on craft practices. For an embroiderer from Yerevan the pandemic has meant buying threads from China from local shops rather than ordering French threads from Syria. For a goldsmith, finding precious and semi-precious stones has become more difficult as sellers are not bringing them to Armenia.

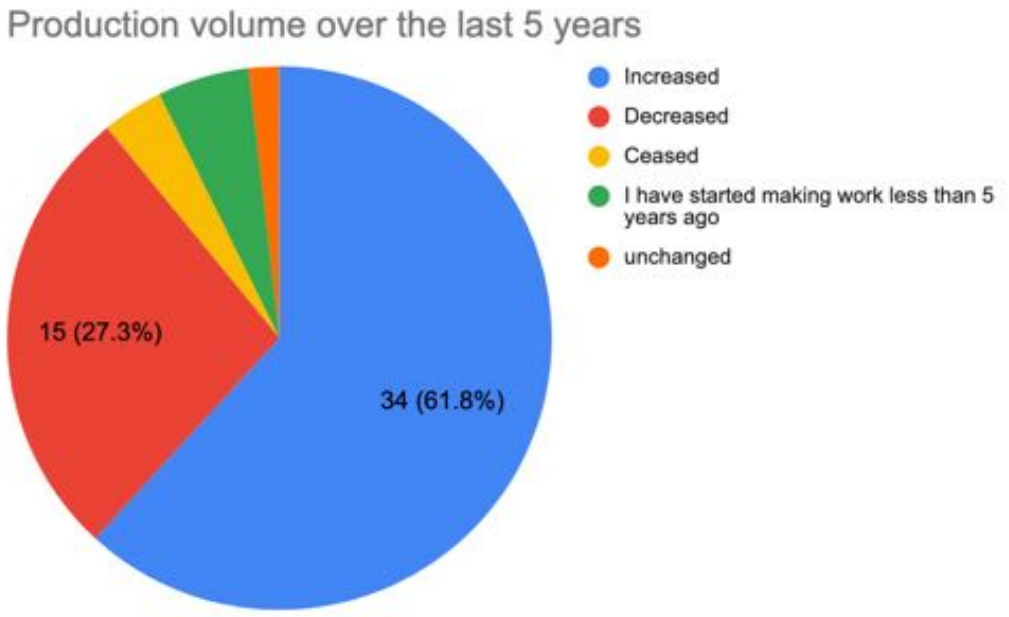
A few more mentioned increased costs of materials or associated services, even if their source itself had not changed. For example, a ceramist who imports raw materials from Russia, Ukraine and Iran finds them more expensive now, and a carpet and rug weaver said it is now more cost effective to take their work to Yerevan personally rather than paying for postage. A carpet weaver, who has opened a small wool factory, mentioned that wool has radically decreased in value since soviet times. An embroiderer mentioned that they now prefer not to depend on materials from abroad and a ceramicist from Yerevan has begun to prepare their own clay rather than buying it processed. For some disciplines, a shift to more local material sourcing is potentially positive and will enable craftspeople to tell a more local provenance story, but this is not the solution for some crafts.



Production and Growth

Over 60% of respondents reported that their production has generally increased over the last five years, though at least 7 specifically mentioned the war and the covid-19 pandemic as an exception to this. For Khachkar makers, their volume of production has increased as a direct result of the war and pandemic, because of commissions for memorials, statues and gravemarkers. For the two newer makers (practising less than 5 years), one has seen an increase and the other a decrease. Two have stopped making in this period though not particularly because of the pandemic or war. One respondent stopped making more than 5 years ago. For those who have seen a decrease in production (15 or 27%) several named the

pandemic and the war, and one mentioned that the decrease was because they are getting older. Another mentioned having an increase in production between 2011 and 2016 followed by a slowing down. This relatively mixed picture (combined with the overwhelming report that overall income has decreased due to the pandemic) demonstrates the complexity of the situation, and the role of attitude combined with social and economic circumstances. Overall production is increasing, but the war and pandemic have placed many of these people in a more challenging economic position.



Sales and customers

Respondents sell their work in a variety of different ways and at various locations, mostly these are physical locations. The most dominant location for sales is the respondents own workshop which might be at home (32 respondents or 57%). This puts crafts people in control of the narrative of their work and means they often participate in selling their own work. For a few makers working in commercial, cultural or tourist centres, including hotels, such as Machanent's House, the Telik Centre or the Tufenkian complexes, they may use the retail mechanisms of these organisations such as their online or physical shop, forming part of a broader cultural tourism ecosystem. An embroiderer mentioned working with tour agencies initiating workshops with other producers and a small number of other respondents teach masterclasses to tourists.

Some, particularly those working on an orders-only basis, may bring the work directly to their client such as some tonir makers, so may not sell from a physical space.

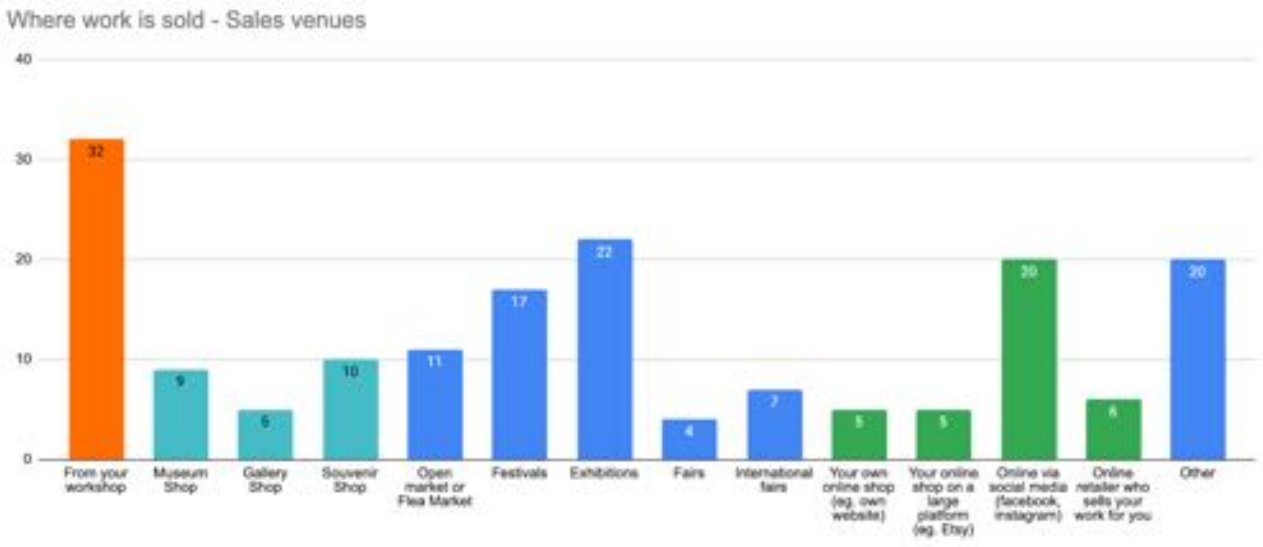
Temporary spaces such as festivals, exhibitions and fairs are also popular, with some selling abroad at events in Russia, Lebanon and Israel. The MAP is mentioned in relation to fairs by some respondents.

Online selling is used by a relatively large number of respondents (20), particularly direct selling via social media sites. This does seem to be in its infancy, with more than one respondent

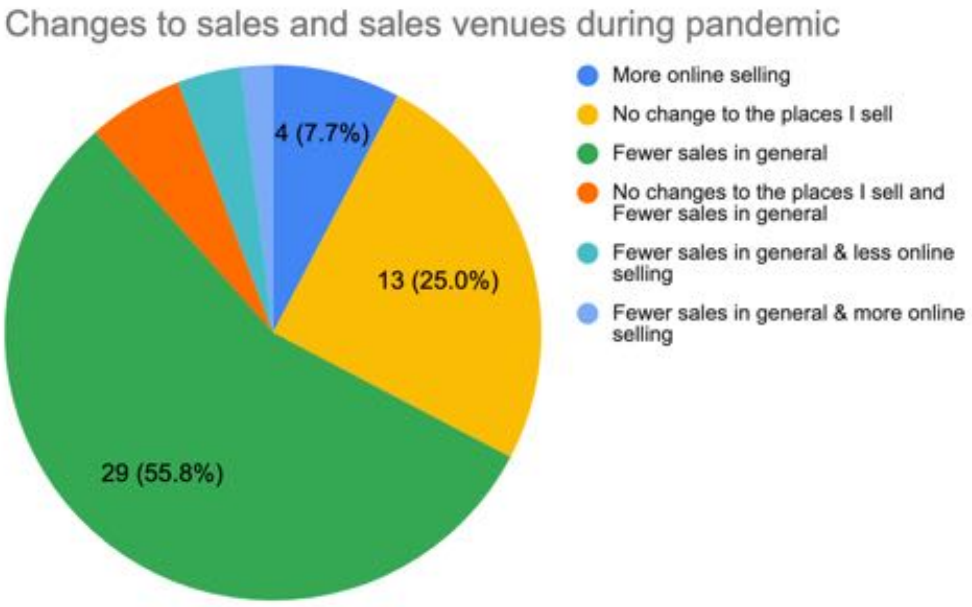
saying that online sales are a smaller part of their overall selling. Changing communication methods rather than the rise of global e-commerce seem to be relevant factors here. As a comparison to the internet and smart phones, consider the emergence of mobile phones: a tonir maker told us ‘there was a time when I travelled by a truck from village to village to sell my products. But I didn’t like it. In the 2000's, when cell phones just started to become popular I made advertisement boards and attached in roads. People started to call me and working this way was pretty easier.’ Likewise the ease of online communication is starting to have some impact on sales and the general way that people communicate.

It is interesting to note that the respondents who have worked with the MAP appear more likely to engage with online communication or selling. They account for more than half of the respondents who sell via online shops, and 9 out of 20 respondents who sell direct via social media. Online does appear to be a smaller part of overall sales for all respondents.

Permanent retail outlets including galleries, museum shops and souvenir shops are less popular options, yet remain significant. Other specialist retailers were mentioned by respondents, for example a duduk maker sells through music shops and a ceramist sells in Duty Free shops in airports. Some makers sell internationally. For example, a duduk maker sells instruments in Israel. There is a market for Armenian craft in Armenian communities in other parts of the world.



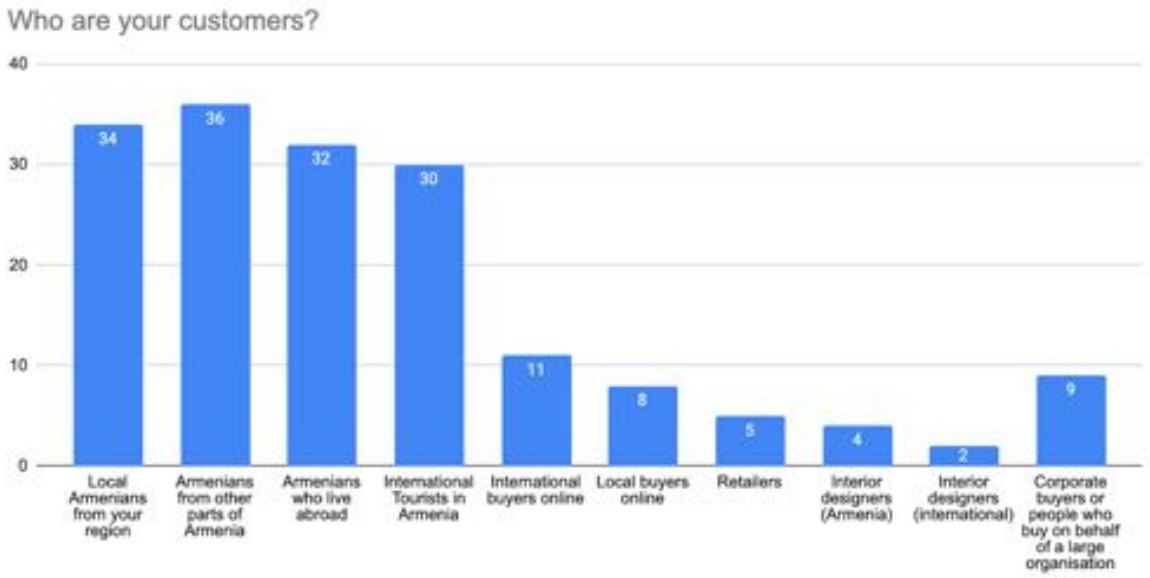
The Covid-19 pandemic had a perhaps inevitable negative impact on sales. At least 35, 62%, respondents told us this. Though there hasn’t necessarily been changes to sales venues, exhibitions and fairs were cancelled globally. 5 respondents said that they had more online selling since the pandemic began. Considering craft as an economic activity, this shows a fairly limited adaptability to the short term changes brought on by the pandemic, and also possibly a shrinking market overall. Support in communication to find new markets and to grow their networks, may help to improve future resilience, though this is not necessarily specific to craft business practices, and relates more to general communication and storytelling skills, as well as an individual interest and desire to grow their business in traumatic circumstances.



Our respondents sell to a range of customers, with each respondent generally selling to 2 - 3 of the following groups: local Armenians in their area, Armenians from other regions, Armenians who live abroad, international tourists in Armenia, international buyers online, retailers, interior designers (Armenia), interior designers (international), corporate buyers or buyers on behalf of large organisations. Some respondents were able to indicate which groups they sold more to, but there is no discernible pattern to this.

Armenians at home or abroad, and international tourists, are the most common customer groups ranging from 30-36 respondents. Online sales are not yet significant for most respondents, but at least 11 respondents are selling to international buyers in this way, and 8 to local buyers. This is possibly a potential area for future growth if paired with appropriate infrastructure including internet literacy, support with e-commerce, and making exporting more accessible. While the narrative of the maker and the experience of buying the work physically is often an integral part of the experience, this narrative can be developed online too, and could help crafts people to encourage both physical and online sales, and build resilience for the future, though it should be approached with caution to avoid exploitation or situations where craftspeople are unable to fulfil orders.

Respondents generally sell less often to people from their own local area, though there are exceptions. Armenians abroad are important customers for many respondents. Whether international tourists buy is sometimes down to the craft itself. For example, a tonir maker mentioned that international tourists come to look, but do not buy often, partly because of the large size and shape of tonirs. Another tonir maker (from the Kotayk region) said that basically their customers are from Yerevan. There are some very specific markets related to particular crafts. A duduk maker mentioned Yazidis for example and a ceramicist sells to restaurants.



Corporate buyers and other ‘benefactors’ (term used by a khachkar maker) are an important customer group for a significant minority. Looking beyond the tourist market towards events, fashion or interior design for example may offer potential areas for diversification of the customer base and for new relationships with different types of customers for those interested in growing their craft business. There are already similar relationships such as the ones described above in relation to music. The covid-19 restrictions have highlighted that the dependence on international tourists for many crafts people (an embroiderer mentioned that 80% of sales came from international tourists, for example) is risky.

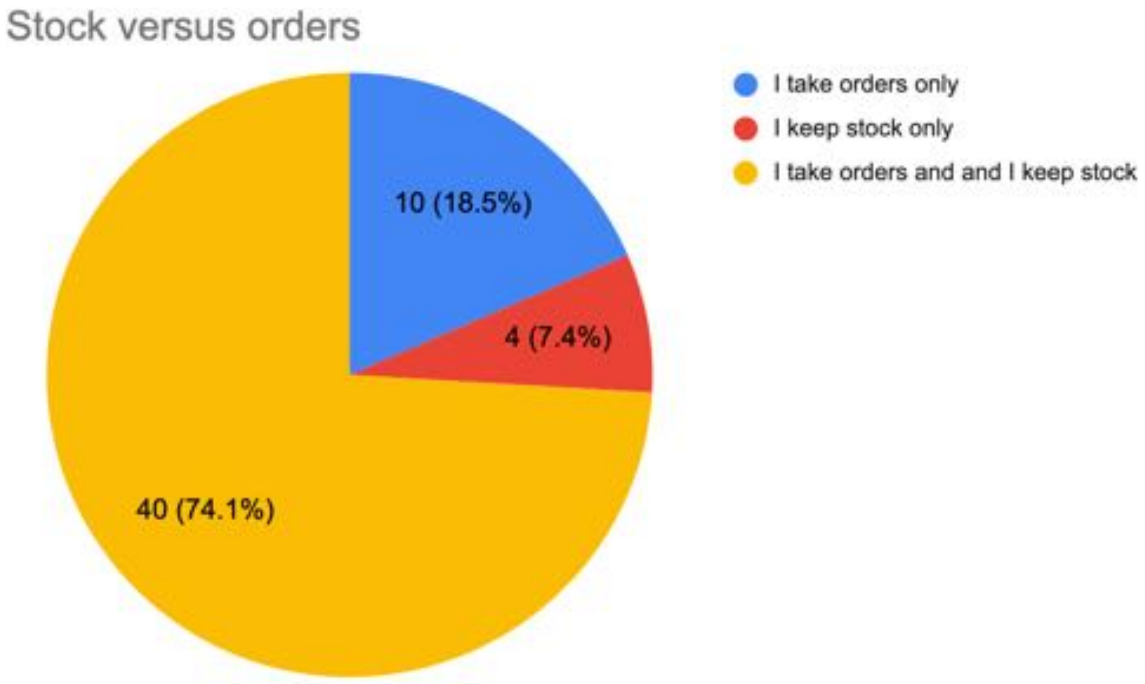
Lilit Melumyan working on Aintap embroidery

Day to day management and quality control

The majority of respondents keep stock and take orders, with orders generally being more significant than stock. Commissions, orders for specific occasions or with specific requirements provide opportunities for relationship building, that is different from simple retail. A ceramist mentioned that keeping a lot of stock is now becoming quite risky, presumably due to the challenging economic conditions. For some practices and some locations, including ceramics and tonir making, there is a seasonal aspect to the work, where stock is built up when it is possible to make, and in anticipation of the main selling periods. It is not possible to make through winter. A rugmaker mentioned that the stock kept is for tourists. A Khachkar maker mentions taking orders from members of the Armenian community abroad. For those who only take orders, they still generally need to keep a good supply of materials (this is mentioned by a Goldsmith and a rug

weaver), so working on an orders-only basis is not necessarily risk free.

Cash is the predominant payment type made to crafts people in exchange for their products. All respondents selling work reported that customers pay cash. Bank transfer is in second place (22 respondents). One respondent has been paid using a money transfer system and 3 have taken card payments through an app or other means.



As is the case with most craft production in other places, there is no external quality control. 55 respondents rely on their own skill and knowledge for quality control, with the remaining respondent relying on their reputation. 2 ask trusted colleagues or teachers in addition to relying on their own judgement.

Where respondents employ others or work with others, they check the work themselves with responses like ‘I control them’ or where they work with family members, or people they have trained themselves, there is a sense of trust that the work will be completed to a high standard. There are a few exceptions, namely a blacksmith who only employs others to perform unskilled labour, so the ‘responsible’ part of the work sits with the master craftsperson, and a wood carver who ‘cooperates with guys who studied in a college of applied arts, there is no need to control them’.

However, overall, there is a sense that the close relationship between makers helps to maintain quality (‘only my son and me’ or ‘my daughter helps when I have big orders’) with no further explanation of how they maintain quality. Close proximity in making, and its sense of small scale and care, contributes to both learning and maintaining quality. Some respondents' responses give a real sense of the relationship between quality control and teaching: For a wood carver, ‘I play the role of a teacher. Usually I cooperate with artisans who have education in their sphere’.

For a carpet and rug maker, ‘I give them some experimental tasks. One to five times. Usually from the third time they comprehend the right way of working. Then I give them real tasks, of course if their work is quality.’ Two embroiderers take this a step further to support skills development and quality outputs through financial reward: ‘Sometimes our students help us. We sell their works separately for them to know that they can earn money by their craft. There’s no sharing process.’

Craft making spaces and business arrangements

Respondents generally make their work in their own spaces, including dedicated workshops away from home (25), dedicated spaces or workshops at home (22) or at home, but not in a dedicated space (12). This is to an extent dictated by the type of craft. For example most textile practices can take place at home, while blacksmithing requires a dedicated space. Several textile practitioners work at home in addition to working in a workshop, reflecting both portability and practicality and their history as domestic crafts. A small number make their work in communal spaces and community arts centres (3) such as Machanents house and the Goris Women’s Development Resource Centre. A rugmaker has a workshop at home, but also makes in a factory. A tonir maker works at the customer’s house, and a wood carver worked in a museum. For a khachkar maker it depends on the particular order.

Wooden dishes by Albert Mirzoyan

Rhythms of making - craft and everyday life

23 respondents make their work around other household tasks such as childcare or housework, while 18 are free to make craft work whenever they choose. 17 make their work at specific times of the day, often these respondents work regular full days of 8-10 hours. 4 of our respondents make their work in their spare time outside another paid job. For some clay workers (ceramists and tonir makers) the rhythms of making are often determined by the

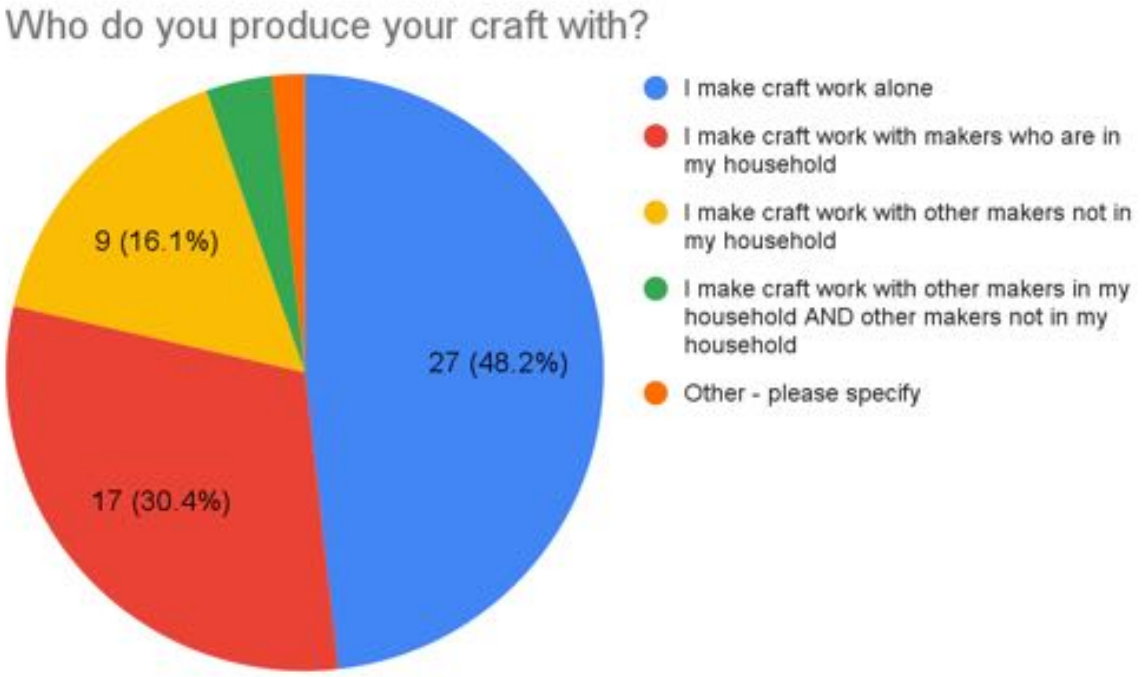
material itself, with drying time being an important factor. Overall this suggests an autonomous and flexible workforce where craft is often combined with other activities throughout the day.

Working together

Some respondents work alone, whilst some make with others in different arrangements. The largest group are those who work alone (27), though 5 of those occasionally work with family members. This might involve a little bit of helping out such as taking or fetching tools or more significant involvement. 17 work more regularly with those in their household including children, siblings, spouses. Those who work with people from outside their community tend to work with their students or student employees. A jeweller, for example, gets others to ‘make silver shapes’ that he then shapes and joins. 2 respondents work both with family and others. 1 wood carver works with other professionals such as blacksmiths, stonemasons and turners depending on the specific work. He does not consider them to be part of his business. Another woodcarver occasionally collaborates with his wife, a carpet weaver, to make hybrid objects. The respondent who is a college student works alongside teachers (but is not in business with them).

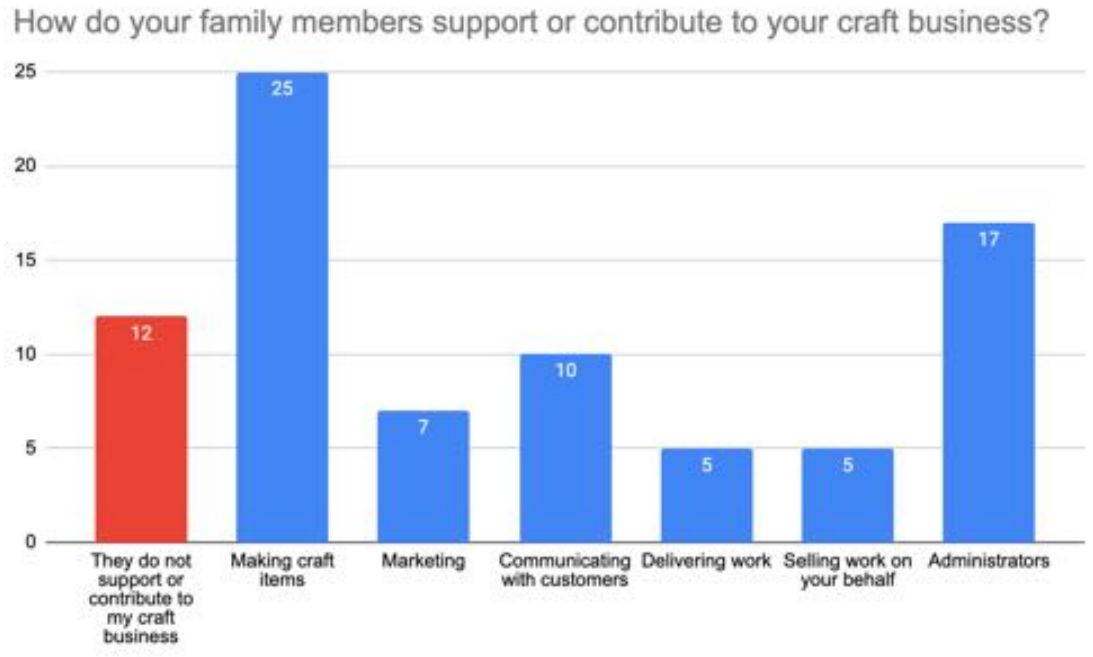
Of these makers who work with or alongside others, almost all consider those who they work with to be part of their business. The only exceptions are two sisters working alongside one another doing their embroidery, but who are not in business together, and the jeweller who has others make silver shapes for him, and the wood carver who engages in collaboration with other professionals he is not related to.

For those makers for whom the question was appropriate, profits are generally spent on buying more raw materials and on general family needs. Consequently, those whose craft income has been affected by the pandemic, has potentially affected the whole family group.



When family-workers are involved with making craft, they are generally only trained informally, within the group (35 respondents). There is one exception who trained their family worker at home and they had formal training. A khachkar maker trained his brother at his workplace rather than at home. It is not clear whether this was part of formal training.

Family-workers are not only engaged in making; they are also engaged in marketing, communicating with customers, delivering, and selling work. The most common answer outside of making craft items is doing administration, with 17 respondents receiving administrative help from their families.



16 respondents hire workers from outside their families. These range from 1 to 12, regularly or more likely on an ad hoc basis. Some are specialists such as a jeweller who employs 5 people to undertake specific tasks (casting, stone cutting, stone setting, polishing and an auxiliary jeweller) and for some others, such as blacksmiths, they might employ a few labourers. A tonir maker told us that he often gets requests from people to come and work from him in order to learn. He does not accept these requests as he would only like to train his son, so his son is able to earn a living in the future without competition from others because he feels the market itself is limited. Limited market size or demand is confirmed by other tonir makers within this study.

Ceramics studio of Shahe Haroutunian

Economic situation

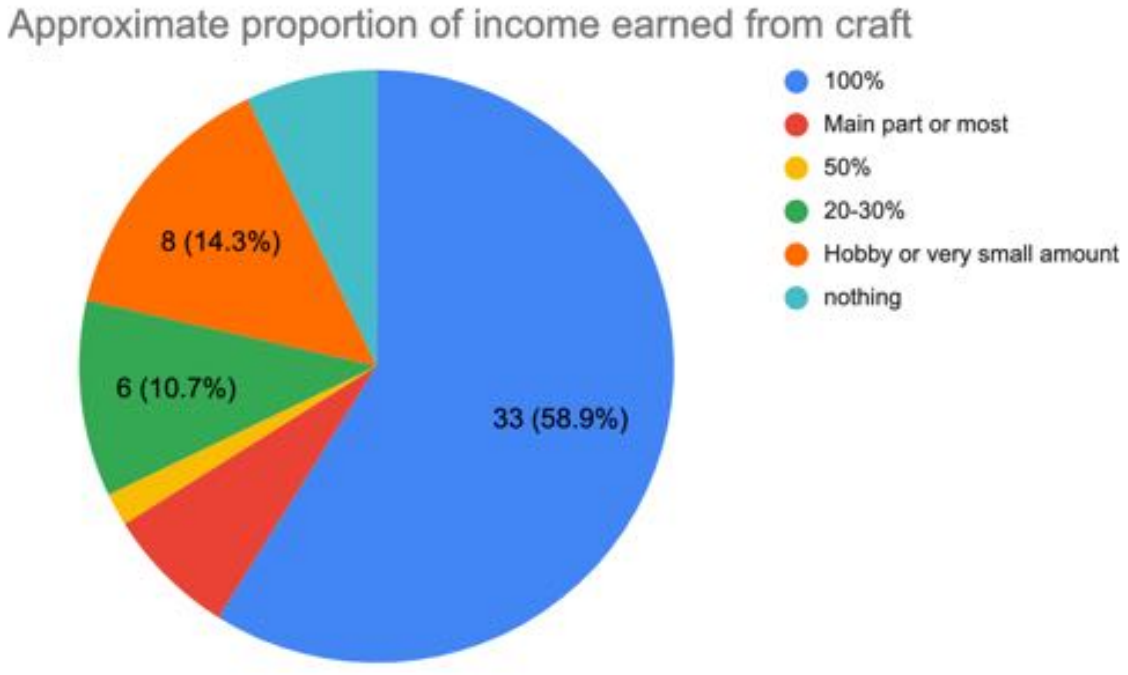
The next section covered income in order to ascertain the perception of the economic conditions within the sector. Respondents were asked about their income and their perceptions of how to grow the business aspect of their craft practice. To avoid conflict or difficulty respondents were not asked to specify their actual income.

The majority of respondents (51) think that craft can in principle support economic growth. 5 of these respondents felt this emphatically or strongly, and 2 more tentatively. 2 disagreed and 3 didn't know. For those who agreed, a small number qualified this in various ways: 3 suggested that if an effective business is built around a craft practice, then it will contribute to economic growth. (eg. 'The master of any business is a craftsman, everyone must master any craft.')

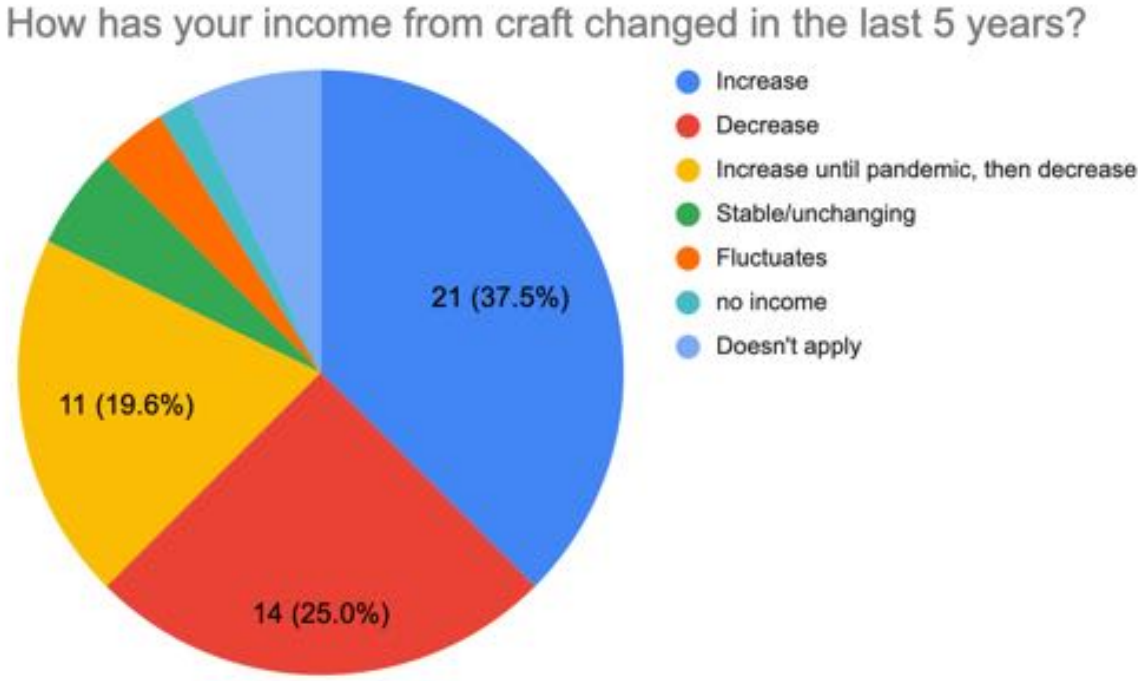
2 respondents said it supports growth if there is demand. 1 suggested craft unions would facilitate growth, and another linked growth to the development of tourism (MAP).

Other comments referred to the current economic environment, 1 reflected that 10 years ago it was better, and 1 said that crafts in Armenia need to be improved in general to support economic growth.

For our respondents, most earn at least part of their living from their craft. This may include selling craft (the majority) or a combination of selling and teaching, and in one case selling raw materials (yarn) in addition to making finished products. They may run a small or medium-sized business or operate as an individual maker alongside other activities in a less formal manner. 33 of 56 respondents earn all their income from their craft, with 4 more respondents earning the main part of their income from craft. For 8 respondents they earn a very small amount, or only enough to reinvest in their practice and may consider it to be a hobby. For 7 respondents it is a significant supplement, but not the main part of their income, ranging from 20-50% of their total income. 4 do not earn anything from their craft. This last number includes those who may have previously earned from their craft or who may in the future (in the case of the teenage student).



Actual growth is a mixed picture. 21 or 37.5% of respondents reported that their income from craft has increased over the last 5 years. 25% said it decreased. 11 (19.6%) noted that their income was increasing until the covid-19 pandemic. For some of these respondents they may have had no income at all for over a year .



A focus on tonirs to demonstrate the complexity of this analysis:

A tonir maker mentioned changes in lifestyle have reduced the demand for their product ('Youth doesn't want to suffer. They prefer electric stove'). 2 tonir makers from the same region, Aragatsotn, have seen a decrease in income. A tonir maker from the Kotayk region whose business could be described as innovative and energetic, making both traditional tonirs and some different shapes and sizes for cooking in different ways reported a small decrease (war and pandemic related) but overall appears to be running a successful and growing business. He sells primarily to customers in Yerevan. While he does not use the internet himself, he has a facebook page managed by his son who is also learning to make tonirs. A tonir maker from the Tavush region (Dilijan) who considers his tonir making to be a hobby, has meanwhile seen an increase.

A duduk maker commented that years ago it was much better but now he only sells 1 or 2 instruments per month.

When asked what they thought would stimulate growth or be the main driver of growth in their business the responses varied significantly with very few patterns. 17 respondents described a love, passion or enthusiasm as the main driver with 1 more mentioning a positive attitude. Only 3 mentioned business specific skills or education. 7 respondents mentioned external conditions including selling opportunities such as festivals, tourism, overall economic growth, and peace. For the remaining responses there is an even split between passive drivers such as state support, having lots of orders (demand) or material abundance, education for all, and active drivers like innovation, cultural development, creativity, product quality, continuity, national culture and developing reputation over time. Overall this may suggest that motivations are

probably more aligned with developing a creative practice rather than developing a profitable business. The mindset is not particularly entrepreneurial considering these responses.

A key question for development agencies to ask when designing interventions or training is whether people are interested in developing their practice or their business. There is also a sense that the soviet period has had a lasting impact on individual motivation or ability to develop a business. The professional development module developed by Rachel Darbourne as part of the Crafting Futures programme in Armenia, could be an appropriate intervention in the informal training environment for craftspeople who are interested in learning more about business. It is interesting that there is no discernible correlation between those who have undertaken business training such as part of the MAP and their answers to this question.

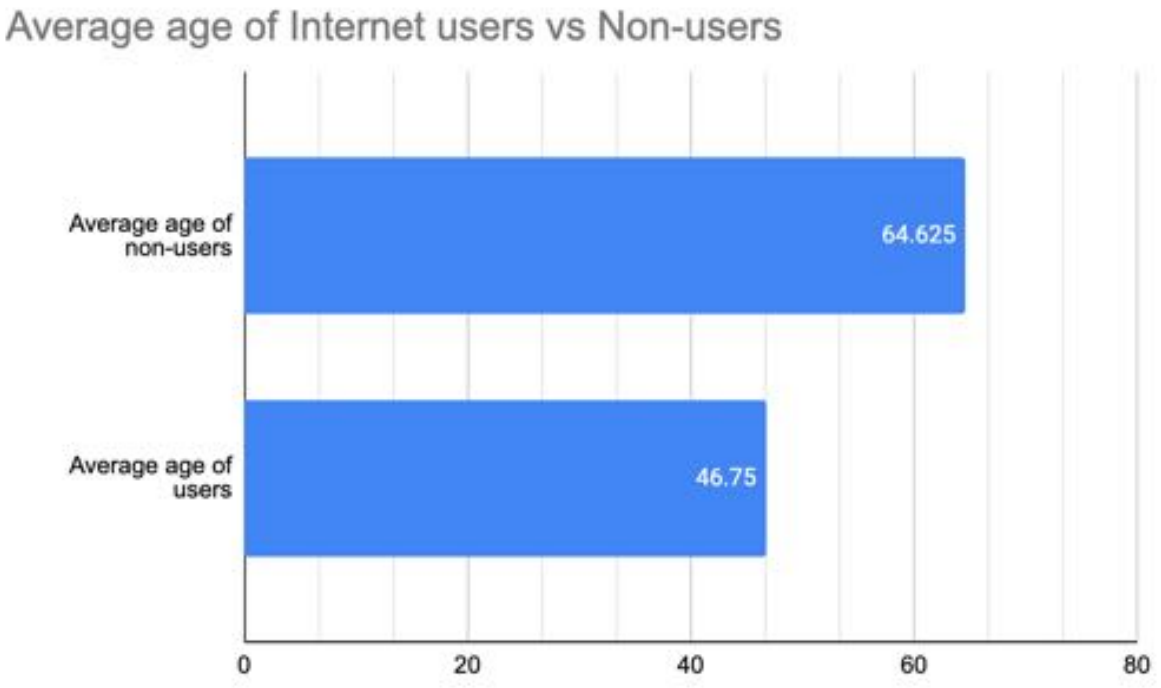
Lace by Naira Arustamyan

Internet use

With the global rise in internet-based communication, social media use, and e-commerce it was appropriate to explore how craftspeople are using this technology. It is also sometimes the subject of development programmes offered to crafts people to help them improve their business. It was also an opportunity to check for intergenerational knowledge transfer from the younger to the older generation, as it is often assumed that young people are involved in teaching older people how to use the internet. With internet use proving vital to small

businesses thriving within the pandemic globally, it is useful data to have, and may to support craftspeople to become more resilient.

24 respondents gave a social media address or email address to us as part of their contact information. Only 8 respondents said they do not use the internet at all, and within that group, 1 is able to do so with assistance. Those who do not use the internet tend to be older. Overall, this suggests that internet literacy and use is fairly high.



19 respondents participated in training programmes involving the internet or online marketing or trading. 12 of these participated in programmes as part of the MAP. 1 particular participant mentioned attending training by the UNDP, MAP and EU, and another in two unnamed programmes. 1 participated in training by the Goris Women's development Resource Centre Foundation, another a state programme by the Ministry of Economics. 37 have not.

A wood carver participated but did not like it, and another wood carver said the most useful thing about these programmes is the social bonds, but did not name the specific programme. A third woodcarver attended training about tourism, but did not specify which organisation ran it.

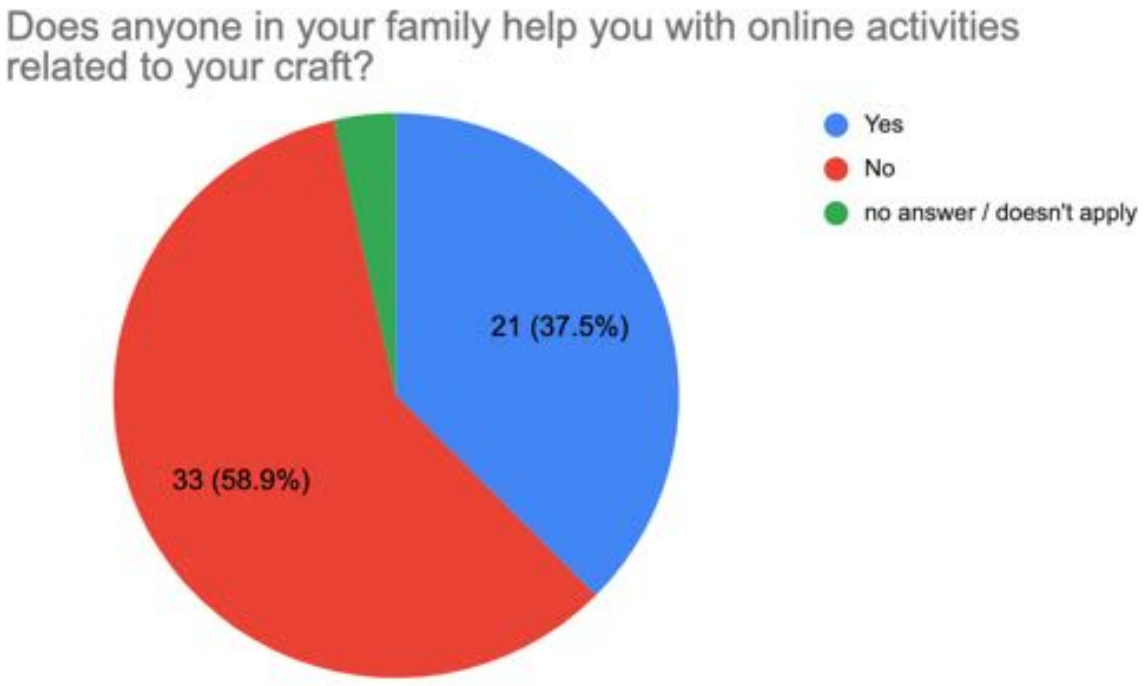
Help the internet from family:

A significant proportion (21, or 37.5%) are assisted with using the internet by their family. This includes children (at least 10), nieces and nephews (at least 4) and spouses (at least 3). It is interesting that our youngest respondent (17 years old) is helped by their father. One respondent who makes musical instruments cooperates with a friend who is a musician, who shows their work online. Tasks that these family members undertake include sharing their work online, administering social media accounts and communicating with buyers. 1 respondent

mentioned sending their daughter to attend training sessions about the internet that they should have attended themselves.

When asked if they need someone to help them, 23 said yes and 30 said no. Some of those who said yes are already receiving some assistance, so there is a desire for more support from some craftspeople. A small number have no desire to get involved with the internet in any way. A blacksmith said they have a lot of orders so don't have time to develop activities on the internet.

Specific help sought by crafts people includes: a web designer to create and maintain a website (at least 5), a marketing or advertisement specialist to help them sell their work (3), someone to manage their social media profiles as they have no time or limited interest and skills (at least 2), product photography (2), online selling, or simply more general help as it is time consuming to manage a online presence and communication. It seems clear that most respondents understand that developing an online presence is often a substantial undertaking that requires time, and potentially specialist help.



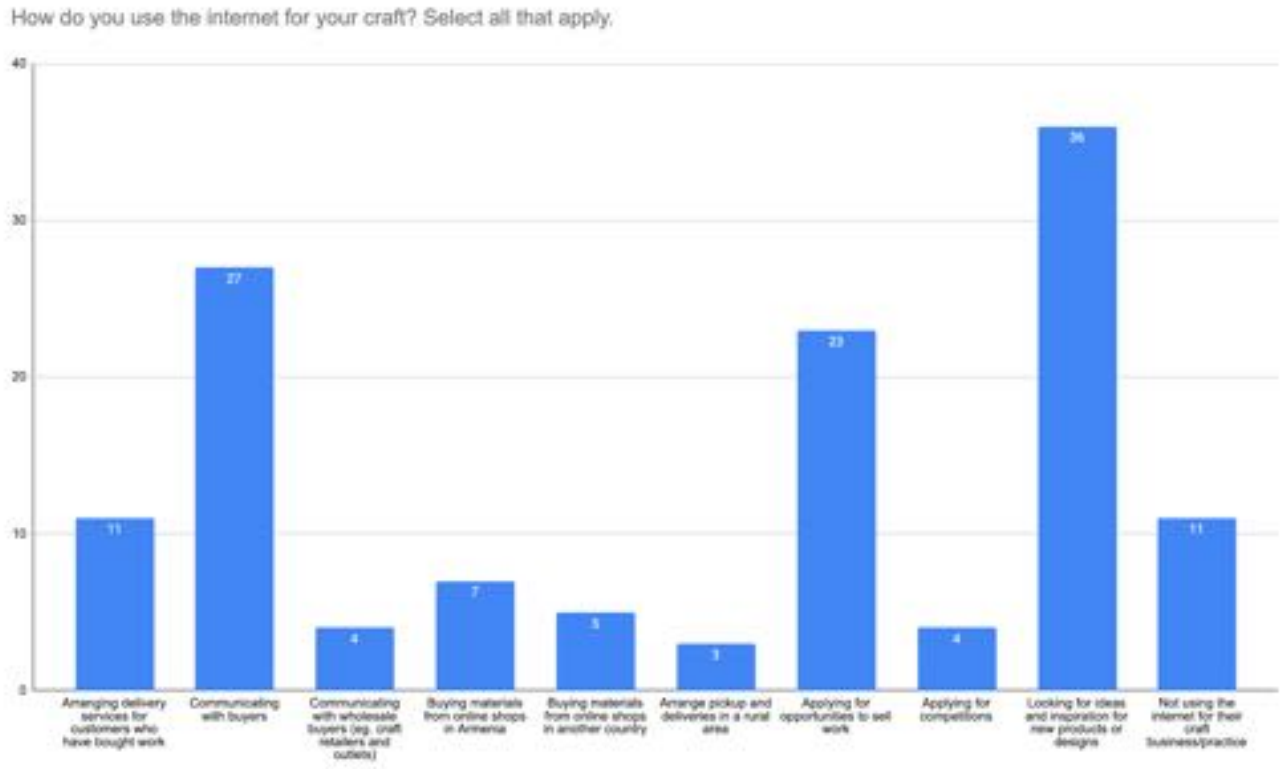
Internet skills

Of the respondents who use the internet, 26 are comfortable with all of the 7 basic tasks we asked them about (email, web browsing, shopping online for materials services, uploading photographs, uploading files, completing forms and communicating with others). For those comfortable with fewer tasks, they were unlikely to be able to purchase goods or services, followed by uploading files or completing online forms. For those respondents comfortable with

only 1 or 2 tasks, there is a lot of variation, though they are most likely to be able to browse the web or communicate with others, but not send and receive email.

Impact on craft practice and business

For those who use the internet for their craft or craft business, a common impact noted by respondents was knowledge (11) with at least 8 using it to seek out inspiration or ideas. A further 3 mentioned learning from others (peer learning) and problem solving more specifically, and one mentioned demonstrating their work online. The other significant impact was recognition or exposure of their practice beyond their local area (11) and attracting customers or orders (8). A further 2 mentioned a general positive impact and 1 mentioned convenience (saving time). For at least 2 respondents, showing their work online is their only platform to expose their practice and has a really significant impact on their business, especially in the last few years. One mentioned they use it as a platform to test out whether people like their work.



9 specified there is no impact, and 1 said a minimal impact. For those who said there is no impact, this includes people who are busy enough not to need further promotion.

More specifically, respondents are using the internet as part of running business for the following tasks:

Looking for ideas and inspiration is a task undertaken most widely (36). Communicating with buyers is also a common task (27) as is applying for opportunities to sell work (23). Smaller numbers of respondents arrange deliveries (14) and buy materials or apply for competitions. For those buying materials some mentioned note.am and list.am locally, and aliexpress.com abroad. The model of the individual maker, perhaps with some help from their family managing all

aspects of the business, including online is the most common amongst respondents, though this is not the only model; a rug and carpet weaver mentioned that they are not integrated within the process of marketing and selling their work because that is done by the company they were working for.

For a significant number of craftspeople the internet is a useful and well-used tool, with further potential. Online selling and communication are important for some, but equally, if not more important, is seeking out information, building online communities and seeing what their peers are doing. While some have no interest in engaging with the internet, others acknowledge the time commitment and see the benefit of using professional services to help improve their business. Within family groups, the internet activities are often managed or supported by other members of the family, a key sharing of skills and responsibilities across generations, providing opportunities to strengthen relationships and promote intergenerational learning.

This section gives a broader picture of the nature of current practice including how crafts people tend to work commercially. Techniques tend to stay the same, but many craftspeople continually change their designs, responding to clients and other stimuli. Armenian craft is an evolving tradition with a very long history. The impact of the covid-19 pandemic and war to production and sales is significant. Though production has overall increased over the last 5 years, the pandemic and war coincide with a drop in income for many of these micro businesses, with the sad exception of Khachkar makers.

Teaching and Learning

> I made my first serious attempt at making [gossamer Armenian knotted needle lace] when I was barely 6 years old. My loving mother patiently directed my awkward fingers. It was not easy, but soon I learnt how to do the knots, forming the regular loops as evenly as I could and then the simple patterns. An expert embroiderer and a very fine lacemaker, Mother always supervised and encouraged me.
>
> Years have passed since that time… loved ones are gone… but my fascination and love for the Armenian heritage needleart have stayed alive with me (Odian Kasparian 1983, 15)

Craft practices are taught formally in vocational colleges (VET), and Higher Education Institutions in Armenia. There are therefore young people engaged in learning crafts across the country in this way. There are also many informal or semi-formal after school learning centres that teach craft to children and young people for pleasure outside of the formal education system. Some of these centres have emerged from the soviet tradition of after school clubs and others as private and often charitable initiatives from Armenians living abroad or development organisations. There are also cultural centres focused on tourism and cultural development. There is also informal intergenerational teaching and learning taking place within family groups, and within workshops. In this section we have tried to capture and understand what is taking place in informal learning practices, to see how this relates to formal educational practice, by asking our respondents about their learning and teaching experiences. In the quote above, Alice Odian Kasparian sums up many of the benefits and character of informal family learning that our respondents told us about, in relation to learning her craft under extremely challenging circumstances as a child in Angora (Ankara) at the time of the genocide: love, patience, personal challenge, and connection to culture.

Learning

Respondents were asked about who they learnt their craft from. Because respondents were initially selected because of their connection to informal learning, including being self taught, the following numbers do not show how dominant informal learning is within the sector.

For those who learnt from within their family group (39 respondents), almost everyone learnt from a previous generation. Exceptions are a wood carver who learnt from his uncle's sons, who also considers himself to be self-taught and one who learnt from both their brother and grandfather. Learning tends to take place within the same gender: women tend to learn from their female relatives, and men from male relatives but this is not absolute, particularly in ceramics and tonir making.

Most learnt from parents and grandparents (31). Five learnt from their mothers, 7 from grandmothers and 4 from both. One embroiderer named her brand after her grandmother who taught her. 11 learnt from their fathers, 3 from their grandfathers and 1 from both. 7 learnt from

other members of their household including uncles (1 stone carver), aunts (rug and carpet weaver), an uncle's wife (carpet weaver) and mother-in law (a tonir maker).

11 respondents are self-taught, including the woodcarver who also learnt from his cousins, and an embroiderer who considers herself self-taught, who learnt some aspects of lace making from her grandmother's sister. 6 learnt from others outside their families, this varies from a friend (a jeweller), to local master craftspeople, including wood carver Henrik Solakhyan who taught at the Wood Craft museum, Tonir master, Seyran, and ceramics master Vahagn Hambardzumyan, and a community carpet weaving project. There are two respondents who had early interactions with local factories that helped their craft learning journeys, which reflects the broader context of soviet era manufacturing, and the disruption of some historically domestic crafts during this period.

Lace maker's pillow, lace by Arevik Babayan

How does learning happen? General themes and environments

Pleasure, love and bonding

Key themes from our respondents' informal learning experiences include a sense of pleasure and delight from both the respondent and the people who taught them with at least 9 respondents talking about pleasure and 7 mentioning love or bonding as part of the learning process. A tonir maker who learnt from her mother-in-law spoke about the pleasure of teaching and learning ('I learnt it with pleasure and she was also teaching me with pleasure'). A carpet

weaver, who learnt from an organised programme in her village, that taught weaving skills to women, that ‘our master was a happy and delighted person’. A wood carver described their relationship with those they learnt from as ‘in a generic sense we had a positive relationship’.

Two embroiderers from Yerevan spoke eloquently about the prominent role of their grandmother in their family. ‘Our relations were so warm, I remember that. She passed away in 1973 and until now if we go to our village we first go to her grave’.

A wood carver who learnt from a master not in their family, recalls the master was strict in his approach to teaching, but now they are close and maintain a good friendship.

Watching and helping

Observation as a learning method was mentioned by 11 respondents - watching the making process and the rhythms of production. Some mentioned that they didn’t feel they were instructed directly, and that the process of observation combined with their own practising was how they developed their skills. For example, a male tonir maker explained that different women from within their community came to his home to teach his mother to make tonirs. While she did not become a successful maker herself, she engaged in other aspects of the production process. He then learnt from these neighbours by observation combined with practising: ‘I watched how these women were working and learnt’. ‘They didn’t tell me anything. … For me this is primitive work but has its secrets. Only by practising one can learn all secrets.’ A duduk maker also mentioned this sense that a lot of the learning is by practising oneself. He learnt from his father but said ‘I didn’t even notice his attitude. Nobody can teach you a craft, you must teach yourself.’ For a blacksmith taught by his father: ‘I watched and learned. He didn’t direct me. The thing is that I learned with pleasure.’

Building on observation, some respondents mentioned helping out or assisting their teacher as part of this process. A rug and carpet weaver explained that ‘since I opened my eyes, I saw how my father was working. From a young age I helped my father and only after his death I started to make alone.’

Being assisted by the master

13 respondents suggested a more active, but varied, teaching process that involved the master helping their pupil directly or setting learning tasks. For an embroiderer, her grandmother used drawing to explain, for a lace maker, her grandmother gave her ‘assignments’. A wood carver was shown how to make more delicate work by their cousins and their father and grandfather had shown them how to make high quality spoons that didn’t crack. This person also learnt at a VET school, but indicated that finesse and mastery came through family-based learning. Development initiatives form part of this type of assistance, with an embroiderer who learnt from her grandmothers mentioning the initiatives of the Armenian Relief Society as an additional source of learning.

A self-taught ceramist mentioned taking some classes with a master who didn’t teach very well, demonstrating that good makers are not always good teachers.

Formal teaching & informal exposure

A few respondents (5) did have formal training at high school, at a vocational school or in higher education, in addition to learning in their communities. A wood carver learnt only at a VET (Vocational education and training) school but was inspired to start after watching his neighbour, a sculptor, making a statue in their village. This neighbour allowed him to watch how he worked

and described the experience as ‘the first sparkle that directed me to learn wood craft in a formal setting’. Another formally educated carpet weaver acknowledged that learning knitting may have started their interest in pursuing a career in craft.

Proximity and motivation

A general observation from the responses is that important factors seem to be proximity and exposure as well as motivation. Even for those who learnt in formal settings, the assistance of creative family members helped. For example a carpet maker whose father was a painter helped them a lot. Several respondents mentioned their independent choice and tenacity to pursue their craft, or that they succeeded where others in their family did not.

Two boys practice woodcarving in Ijevan

Beyond craft

Respondents described what other benefits or skills they learnt as they learnt their craft in this informal manner. Several spoke about patience, pride and confidence. Other personal characteristics that respondents reflected on were peacefulness, wisdom, integrity, modesty and honesty. Two mentioned a positive relationship with nature, and many suggested an overall positive mental outlook or a sense of pleasure, or satisfaction. Others mentioned this as a catalyst for further learning by ‘being self-taught in a wide sense’ or seeking to learn about a related field such as ethnography. Some learnt how to teach or pass on knowledge themselves, or were inspired to do so. Several respondents said their craft is a livelihood and a vocation with phrases like ‘it’s my life’ and ‘I feel respected’’. Communication and building relationships were also mentioned by several respondents. Two embroiderers commented that their grandmother was a great psychologist, suggesting both effective knowledge transfer skills, but also a sense of building human relationships and passing on other types of knowledge alongside technical or creative craft skills.

National and cultural identity featured in a few answers. One particular wood carver described what he got from his learning experience as follows which covers many of the themes that other respondents mentioned: ‘Harmony with the nature. How to transmit traditional knowledge and how to combine with new things. When you’re practising with elders it gives you so many things. This is inheritance, the memory of that person.’ Others spoke about learning or experiencing the geopolitical situation and contributing to national cultural pride: An embroider described it as ‘skill how to grab others attention. How to introduce Armenian. How to love the homeland much more.’ A wood carver noted that their time of informal learning is associated with a feeling of freedom: ‘That was another world, free world. There was a feeling that we are out of the Soviet Union.’

Day to day learning

We asked respondents to describe more specifically how their learning took place. As craft practices are often learnt slowly over a number years, and for many respondents, some time ago, responses varied in detail. However a few key themes emerged.

Many of our respondents began to learn their craft at a young age, with activities likely tailored to that age. For example, an embroiderer learning at age 4 or five said: ‘She was displaying how to do. We were children and she didn’t give us anything hard. She put the base. She was enthusiastic about inheriting us what she knew.’

For at least 14 of the respondents, observation was an important activity in day to day learning. They learnt primarily by watching others make, this might involve spending a lot of time watching a parent or grandparent working in their workshop or looking at their work.

A smaller number described being given firmer instructions or were directly helped by the master they learnt from but structured activities were not specifically mentioned or described by most respondents. This is not to say they didn’t take place, perhaps that they were not able to describe it. An example: ‘In the beginning during the first and second day I looked at her works, then I started to practice, she was saying to me what and how to do and I grasped that easily and fast.’ (Lace maker).

A few were engaged in assisting the master with their work, for example helping with individual tasks such as polishing metal or knitting the inner part of the item after the corners were made by the master.

A relatively small number mentioned copying the work of their master, or examples they found to look at.

Some spoke of going into the workshop daily, perhaps after school, while for others their learning experience was less regular. Daily work appears more common for those learning from direct family compared with others..

Practice, and forms of trial and error, were mentioned by several artisans, particularly those who are self taught, but not necessarily.

A few mentioned a sense of expectation within the family of learning their craft, though more reported convincing their relatives to teach them. They were insistent and enthusiastic with the motivation coming primarily from them. One embroiderer described this as ‘genes+diligence’. A knitter described the combination of enthusiastic interest and observation, together with increasing complexity of activities: ‘Actually I adore knitting. And I dedicated to knitting so

much, that she [grandmother] didn’t tell me anything and I learned by watching. and it happened. After this my mum taught me more thoroughly. She taught how to create a design. Compared with my grandma she described and defined some key moments.

Earning money or seeing their relatives and teachers earn money from their craft, was also a motivating factor to improve skills for at least 5 respondents. A tonir maker and a carpet weaver in particular, were motivated to learn and improve so they could earn money for themselves or their families.

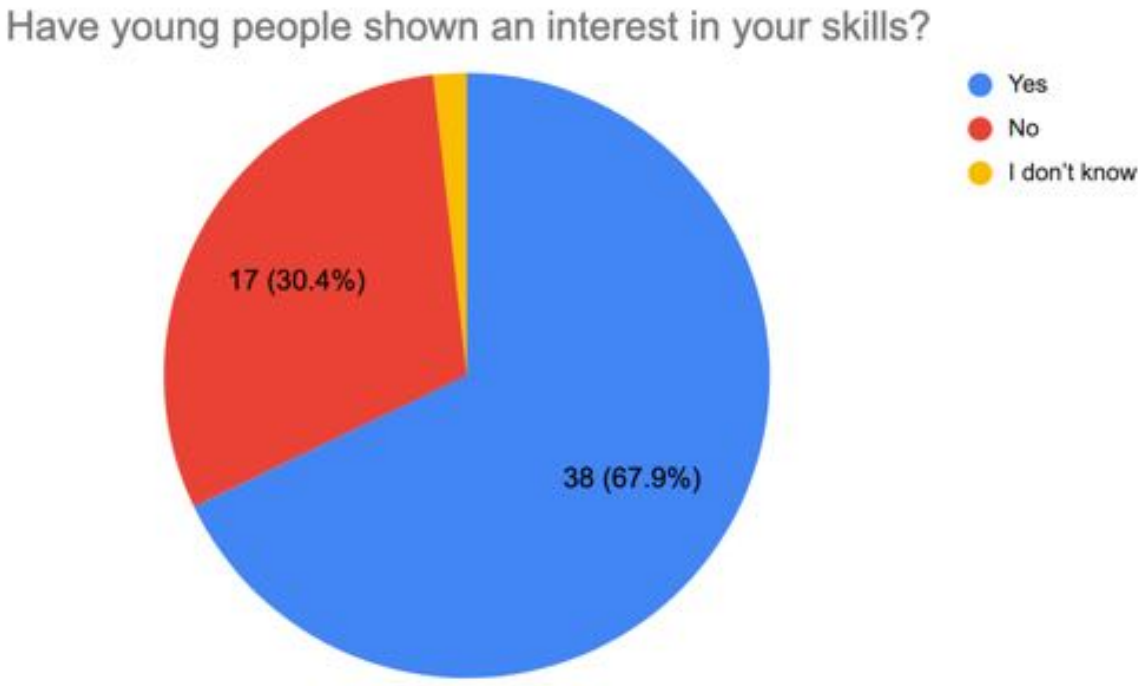
A respondent mentioned productive disobedience, entering their parent’s workshop to make without permission.

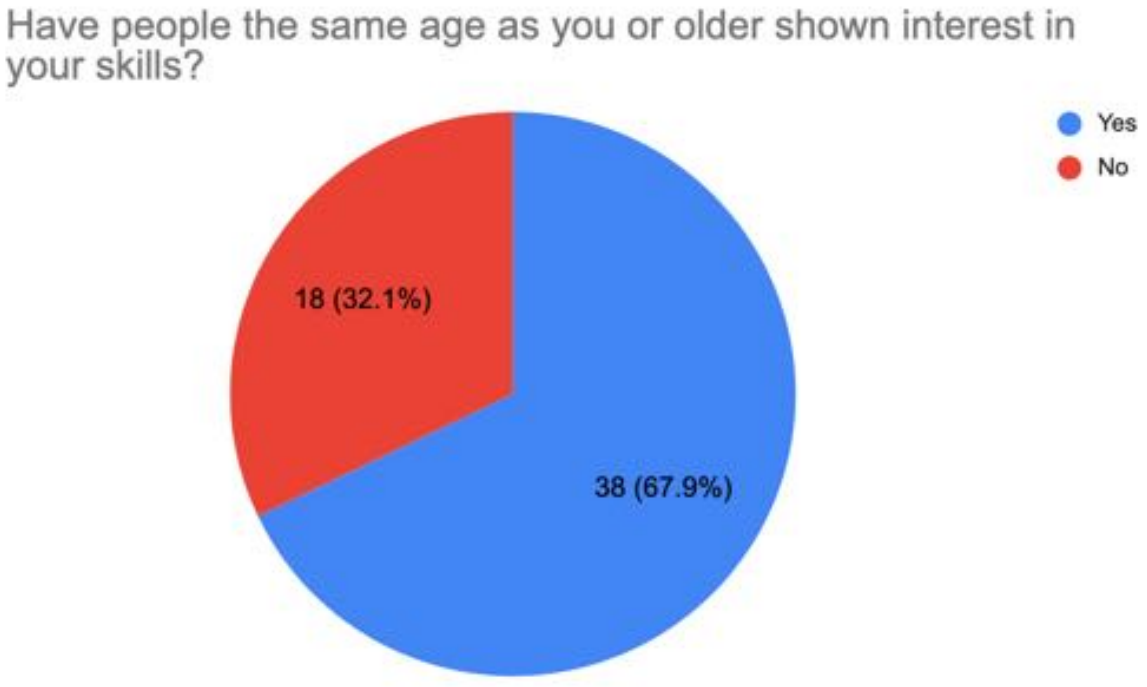
Some mentioned books and museum visits.

Overall everyday learning experiences for most respondents are remembered fondly much like Odian Kasparian’s example. They told us about their passion, interest and affinity, and the patience of their teachers with the exception of one rugweaver who learnt from an aunt who was fairly strict, though she found this motivating, and a wood carver who told us: ‘I was 12 years old. I remember that for 6 months I studied only drawing. I drew while standing. He taught us through torture. You know that teaching through torture is the traditional way of teaching. You cannot learn anything without suffering. He was saying "bad, not good" and didn't explain what was wrong until you found it. Otherwise, when everything is said, you will not learn anything.’ For most respondents however, this was not the experience, they spoke of the patience, kindness and pleasure and their determination to learn.

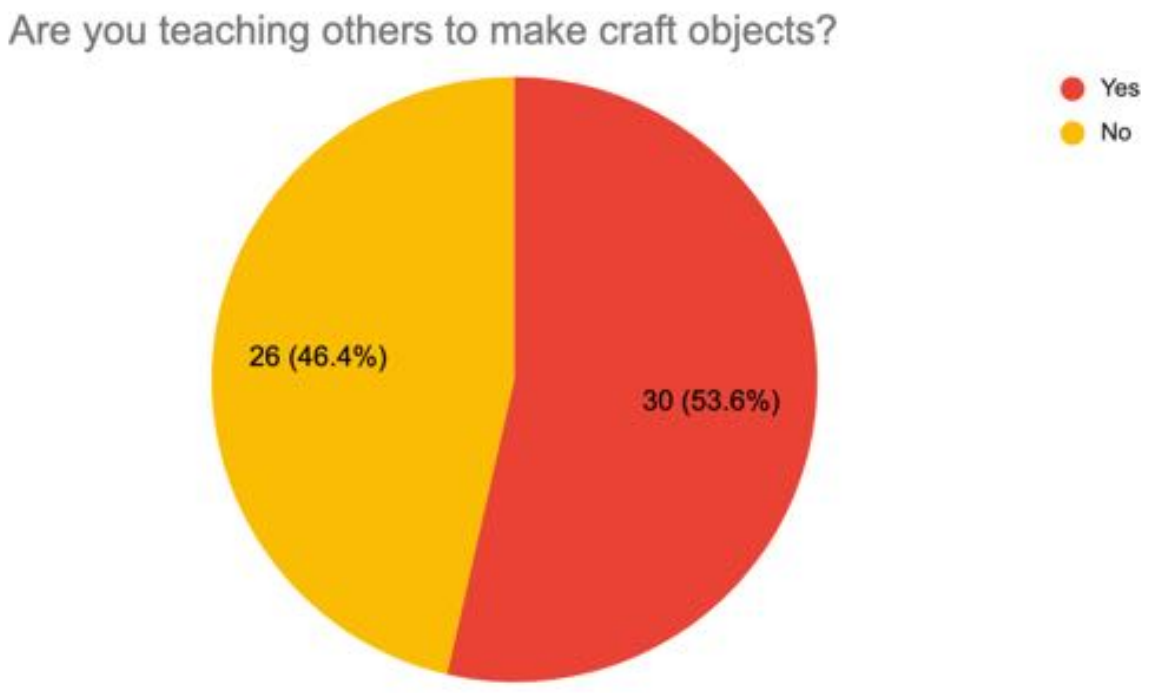
Teaching - Interest and current practice

Questions were then asked about their involvement in teaching, starting with asking who had shown interest in their craft as the future of craft practice lies in passing on skills. 38 out of 56 respondents said that young people have shown an interest in their skills and the same number of respondents said that those the same age or older have shown an interest. A jeweller mentioned that 2-3 people had shown interest that year. A few mentioned that this interest is limited. One blacksmith said it is more the older generation who are interested, while a goldsmith said it was mostly young people. This gives a sense that there is some overall moderate interest in craft skills from those outside the profession, which suggests potential for future teaching and sharing, and potentially, enhancing the sustainability of the sector.





30 out of 56 respondents indicated that they are currently teaching their craft. Only 9 respondents have never taught their craft, across a range of craft practices. For those who have never taught, one is self taught and the others learnt from within their family group.



For those who are currently teaching, the number of current students range from 1 to 600. 12 respondents told us they are currently teaching small numbers of less than 10 students. These typically involve family members. 7 respondents told us that they teach larger numbers of 10-25, these makers teach in formal, informal and semi-formal environments from temporary stints with higher education students to youth centres and through their own workshops and master classes. Most are also teaching family members. For those teaching past and present total numbers of students taught through their careers range from 2-3 to hundreds, though the typical respondent has taught 5-12.

A small number of respondents teach to tourists, including two Khachkar makers. One of them has their own school (see below) and the other has a lot of interest, but limits himself to master classes alongside giving tourists a chance to try when they visit his workshop. Some consider themselves to currently teach, but reported they do not currently have any students, this may be a temporary hiatus due to the war or the pandemic.

Two of our respondents teach very extensively: One self-taught khachkar maker teaches 60 at his own school, the only registered Khachkar school in Armenia, including selling master classes to tourists and is also teaching his son and grandson. Teaching seems to be a vocation. He teaches students who will carve stone professionally, or just for pleasure. He sees the learning activity itself, regardless of future professional ambitions as a positive, productive way for young people to spend time rather than being idle or getting in trouble.

An embroiderer teaches extensively to groups of 30 students in 4 or 5 villages, saying ‘The students are so motivated, After them their moms get motivated to learn too. I also teach in a center of elders activity. I have many students there too. I have a student who is 85 and perfectly makes embroidery works.’ She teaches in village centres and also teaches her

daughter. She sees it as her mission, her mission as an Armenian. She takes pleasure in making and teaching, and feels she should give back to others what has been given to her.

A tonir maker, a Khachkar maker and a jeweller noted that they are only teaching their sons, and a carpet weaver only their daughter. Though on the whole respondents are not secretive about their practice or safeguarding secret skills, one tonir maker specified that they only want to transmit the secrets of their craft to their son. A ceramist specified that they are only teaching Armenians.

Another lace maker is now teaching macrame, and says that teaching lace making is time consuming.

A Khachkar maker is not teaching systematically but during master classes and when tourists enter our workshop they teach them all to do something with stone.

A ceramicist has been teaching for 2 years at the Endanik Youth Creative Centre SNCO. A carpet and rug weaver has stopped teaching rug weaving, but continues to teach carpet weaving. This is strategic, to address the need for carpet weavers, and because they want to specialise in carpet making.

Reasons for not teaching currently

A tonir maker, a blacksmith, a khachkar maker, a furniture maker, a blacksmith, a lacemaker, a woodcarver and carpet weaver says people haven't asked or people are not interested.

A duduk maker says no one is interested, plus he doesn't have time as he is both a woodworker and beekeeper. A ceramist, an embroiderer and a wood carver don't have time. A wood carver doesn't have enough space in his workshop.

A khachkar maker, a fine metalsmith working with repousse and chasing, a rugmaker and a carpet maker said that if people want to learn, they would teach.

A blacksmith said that one life is too short for studying.

Another rug weaver is soon to start teaching. A cultural palace is being constructed in their village and they hope there will be a place there for them as a rug and carpet weaver.

A mushurba maker says students did not endure. He also said he didn't want to have students because it's difficult for him too, to teach, and to continue his own craft successfully.

A knitter is not teaching because of catching covid-19 and being badly affected by it.

A goldsmith says he is impatient and doesn't have space in his workshop, but does give advice to those who ask.

Teaching in the past

54 respondents told us whether they have taught in the past. 40 have taught and 14 have not. This broadly suggests that teaching is declining slightly, with 10 respondents stopping teaching, but in some cases this is due to age of the participants, who may have stopped teaching later in life or to care for sick relatives, or in the case of those who taught their children, those children may have already grown up, having previously learned from the parents. A tonir maker (who

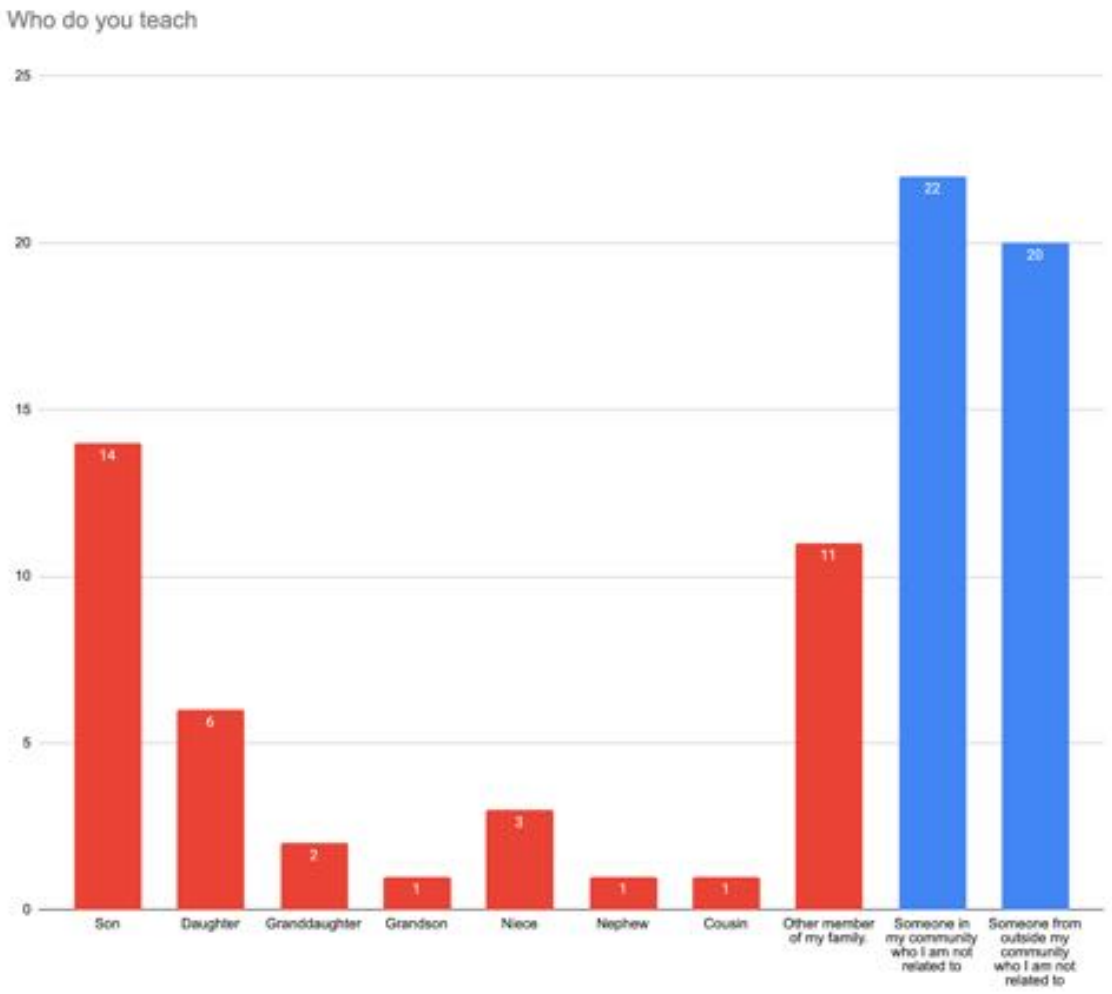
says they are currently not teaching because no one has asked) and a carpet maker taught family members in the past.

Reasons for stopping teaching include a lack of interest or demand (6), a lack of time (3), because of the war (1). A lacemaker said they taught 1992 - 2000, and a pair of embroiders have not taught for about 10 years.

As with learning, knowledge transfer within family groups is exclusively from the older to the younger generation, or within the same generation (see chart below). Other relatives not specified on the chart include a sister (1), wives (2, both ceramicists) and great nieces and nephews.

People from outside the family group include friends, and people from the city or the village. The majority of those who teach outside the family group, also teach their family members.

Teaching takes place in the respondents' own workspaces, at their workshop (15), home (18), or home workshop (5). 10 respondents teach at cultural or community centres or similar central locations, often sponsored by NGOs and foundations, one teaches at their student's home and 4 teach at formal educational settings. Other settings included a museum and in the garden. Teaching in their own space gives craftspeople complete control. One respondent who previously taught at a formal educational institution gave us more details. They would invite students to their own workshop too because they felt the institution's time and resources were insufficient to pass on skills effectively and they eventually left. Overall it seems that the parameters the institution set were not flexible enough for what the respondent considered effective teaching to be.



Formal versus informal teaching

For respondents teaching in more formal ways, including both organised classes at community centres or in schools, colleges and universities, we asked about any difference in approach between formal and informal teaching.

Restriction and Freedom

For some, the set curriculum and timetable was too restrictive:

The same respondent who found the formal setting restrictive, mentioned above said: ‘I have been teaching in a formal setting only for 6 month, but I didn’t like it. The program wasn’t good and there wasn’t enough time to teach my students what I wanted to. I was bringing them to my workshop and that was more productive. We needed almost 4 hour per day but in the Academy we had only one hour per day.’

A lace maker said: ‘In a state institution you have to teach with a special scheme, and there are criteria which you must follow. When I teach at home I follow our emotions and moods. It’s hard

to teach something to your students when they have no mood. It's something like spending time.'

Student-centred approach

For some respondents, the formalised environment didn't affect their approach and enables them to take an individualised, student centred approach:

For a woodcarver, 'University is more restricted, here in my workshop I'm free in a territorial meaning. In both places I teach my students to be free.'

For an embroiderer: 'In the past, when I was teaching in a formal setting there was a program, but every child was individual. In a house we were free. We could direct our students and at the same time students could have their own preferences. Uniformity abates.'

For a ceramist working with young children in a youth centre, formal teaching requires designing an activity that can be done quickly.

An embroiderer notes that teaching her daughter at home is much easier because there is less planning, but takes an organised approach to teaching in more formal settings with set tasks and patterns.

The remaining respondent said there is no difference in their approach, or were not able to articulate a difference.

Connecting with Armenians abroad

3 of our respondents, a jeweller and two embroiderers mentioned teaching Armenian communities in Syria and Iran in the past, reminding us that craft practices are part of maintaining cultural identities for diasporic communities.

Teaching Frequency (semi-formal and informal learning)

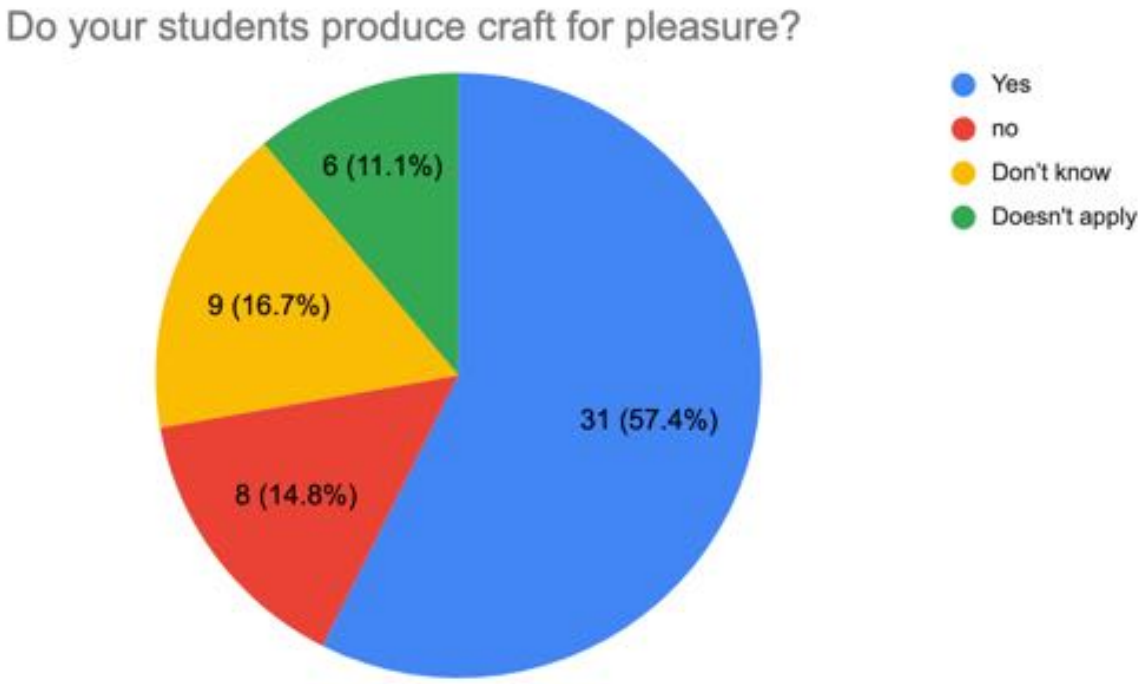
Regular teaching: A fairly large proportion of respondents who are teaching, do so daily (12). 8 respondents teach 2-3 times per week and 2 teach weekly.

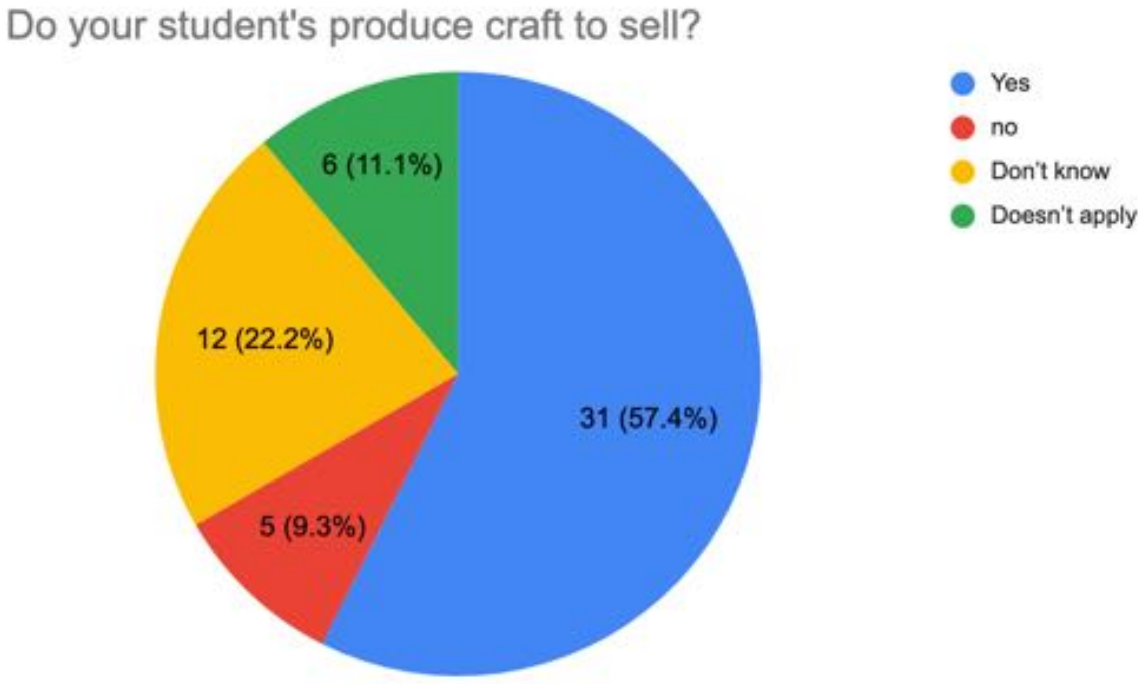
A wood carver also mentioned teaching a short intensive course of 8 days, on a daily basis, to be very effective in maintaining levels of motivation. Another woodcarver mentioned that the overall duration of training a student is 1 - 1.5 years. An embroiderer mentioned that keeping the duration of single sessions under two hours is effective.

For 9 respondents, their frequency was much more random, dictated by the student's and the teacher's requirements, schedules and motivations. From this group a tonir maker mentioned that their students learnt when it was convenient, and were motivated to practice and improve skills when they realised there was money to be made.

Teaching for pleasure versus teaching to train professionals

The number of responses are very similar when asking whether their student produce craft for pleasure and craft to sell, suggesting that to a certain extent, these things are considered the same thing and that craft is inherently pleasurable.





There is also an even split whether or not respondents are teaching people who are younger than them. 21 respondents' students are younger than them and 22 respondents sometimes have older students. For those who teach all ages, they generally have a positive response, but one duduk maker thinks that older people can't learn, and if they do learn, they may then take his potential income. While in family groups the transfer of knowledge goes across or down the generations, it goes either way for learners who are not related.

Motivation for teaching or sharing skills and knowledge

When asked why they taught, several themes emerged. The most popular was to preserve and ensure the continuation of that particular craft or skill (17) and often that was intertwined with a desire to preserve national cultural identity. Another prominent motivation was to give someone a means to earn a living (9). 4 respondents also mention they teach because it is part of their own livelihood. 8 respondents mentioned a sense of moral duty to share their skills and tacit cultural knowledge, as if they had no choice as custodians of their craft. 6 mentioned the pleasure of teaching and 5 mentioned that passing on their own pleasure in making to others motivated them to teach. Two respondents were responding to what the student wanted and 2 more saw it as a way to teach people how to be productive members of society.

Benefit of teaching

When asked what else they get from teaching, the most prominent answer was pleasure or satisfaction (29 responses). 3 more specified the pleasure of supporting people in the community. For 10 enables the development of human relationships and communication with others. For 3 it was about pride and a sense of their lineage continuing. For 4 respondents, they learnt new things from their students. For 3 it was about participating in preserving national heritage. 1 mentioned money and another didn't know.

How does informal teaching take place?

It can be challenging to describe an instinctive, tacit activity like teaching craft practices, but it is interesting to hear the actual responses of the participants to get a sense of their teaching practice. A number of key themes emerged and responses are grouped below:

Pragmatic approaches:

These involve drawings and templates, and step by step approach practical instruction. Craftspeople also consider safety and prevent damage to and wasting of resources by carefully watching their students.

'We draw on stone, we learn with a book, I correct mistakes'

'I made the sketches, I showed them the direction'

'I notice that sometimes my son gets so excited and can damage and spoil the khachkar. I control their work and draw sketches for them, step by step they improve themselves.'

'These students are from my community and mostly my relatives. I draw for them and they carve by my drawings. Everything is practical.'

'Step by step = The key point here is the question "What to do next". I show them and they proceed.'

'I stand behind them and control the whole process. Also because I care about safety. I give them commands like "go a little further", "take glasses".'

'Once I was not in the studio and my students broke the drill bit.'

Learning through making:
This appears to be the overarching approach, and would be the opposite of extensive theoretical teaching. This immersive, practical approach involves practical making from the beginning, with students participating in all parts of the process from the beginning.

‘They hit the dungeon from the beginning’ (blacksmith)

‘My students were participating in every process. And while we were working in my workshop, time was never enough for us.’

‘In Aleppo, Syria everyone [Armenians] knew that, so there were no need to teach them.’

‘I started teaching from 2015. For me it’s important to draw, so I showed my drawing to my students.’

‘I was 22, I controlled them when they working’

‘These students are from my community and mostly my relatives. I draw for them and they carve by my drawings. Everything is practical.’

Sewn collage of student’s embroidery work by Armine Khachatryan

Student Centred approach
Many of the respondents describe what can be called an individual, student-centred approach: This involves evaluating progress on an individual basis to improve work. Students are given the space to learn at their own pace and to develop, acknowledging that students learn in different ways and at different speeds. This gives them the freedom to make. It is intense and time consuming for the teacher. It involves building rapport and enduring relationships and transferring skills that go beyond the mechanics of making, in the words of one respondent: ‘it’s a way of transmitting life’. One respondent taking this approach also observed that it was difficult to get students to think for themselves and make their own decisions about their style and interest in a formal setting (using this individualised approach). They remarked that students tend not to think so much, and can’t show their interest and style and were only able to copy. They attributed the students’ restraint to the political conditions (an authoritarian regime) and

their prior educational experience, built on a soviet model. Allowing students choice and freedom so they are motivated to make is part of the approach for some respondents. This may be considered, to an extent, a digression from a traditional soviet educational approach.

‘I have students aged 10-17, until the age of 40 students come. I try to find their weaknesses and strengthen them’

‘I have been teaching since I was 21 years old. I teach them every day because I call them personally. Because it’s dangerous and I have to control them.’

‘Every student has its preferences. All of them have individual speed of learning. When we were teaching at home they were coming irregularly. As I was teaching in a formal setting for me there were no weekends. When people feel your need you can’t reject them.’

‘People with different skills and professions were coming to us. We were applying different technologies of definition.’

‘But when I was teaching face to face it depended on the student's efficiency. It's a very alive and individual process.’

‘You teach them many other things besides methods, it’s not a narrow process, but a way of transmitting life.’

‘It doesn’t matter how many students I have during a class, I teach them individually. Students differently digest that knowledge: earlier or later. It’s important for me to give them a way to create whatever they want and by what colours they want. For instance I had a student in my elder group and she was inspired to make embroidery by Van Gogh’s colours. And she definitely was much more motivated than if she made some of my patterns and graphics. Everyone in my classes embroiders the designs which she wants.’

Observation

Observation is not as prevalent in answers from respondents about teaching, compared to when they spoke about their learning. Nevertheless, this is still a recurring theme with students learning from our respondents by watching them work. Speaking about teaching her daughter at home, a carpet maker said: ‘As I mentioned she learned my watching. I really wasn’t involved in it that much.’ Another mentioned that though she had made a plan for students to follow, they didn’t look at it, preferring to learn by watching her weave. Some respondents expressed surprise at how fast some students picked up on things through observation and demonstration.

An unusual exception, but an example of demonstration and observation,was a wood carver who did some demonstrating for Armenian television.

‘I started to teach when I was 14 years old, I was in 8th grade in school. There were two Armenian channels. In the Second Armenian channel there was a project where I was teaching how to carve. It was broadcast 2-3 times a week.’

Speed, hard work and motivation came up as regular themes too. A tonir maker linked speed with focus and motivation, saying that it is surprising how fast you can learn if you need to. In contrast, a Mushurba maker found that the long intense 8 hour days he required from students was too much for them, too long, too intense, too dirty and too loud. At least two other respondents mentioned the intensity of both teaching and learning some craft practices, describing the hard physical labour required, and the intensive nature of the work, without holidays.

‘I liked the role of a teacher. We were sitting abreast and I was showing how to work. And they learned. To be honest I was so strict, but in the end I was giving them sweeties.’

I started to teach when I was 40. I have been teaching for almost 8 years. I teach 3 times a week. And what is interesting is that I have drawn for them a weaving map, but they have looked at me and have copied me by weaving without a map. You know, I don't like it when the room is dirty and I order my students to work in a clean room. The floor was dirty at the time, but one of my students learned in an hour how to end the knot and I closed my eyes to the fact, that there was dirty. I was happy because I didn't expect them to learn this quickly.’

‘In the case of my daughter I showed her once and she learned. Maybe she also had that specific attitude to knitting.’

Time

An important characteristic of informal learning appears to be a relaxed sense of time.

this flexible approach allows flexibility, and one artisan specifically spoke about not hurrying his brother as he was learning, and not being forceful about when to finish:

‘There’s no specific time, how it goes, it depends on us. I give them some wood, tools and time to time control their works. I give them tasks to do.’

‘When I was teaching to my brother I was new in this as well. Firstly I taught him techniques and then how to draw sketches. I never make him to hurry up while working, I permit him to finish whenever he wanted, by his mood.’

Same as how they learnt

Only one respondent explicitly said they teach the same way as their father taught them, but there are clear parallels in the themes raised in this section and the learning section.

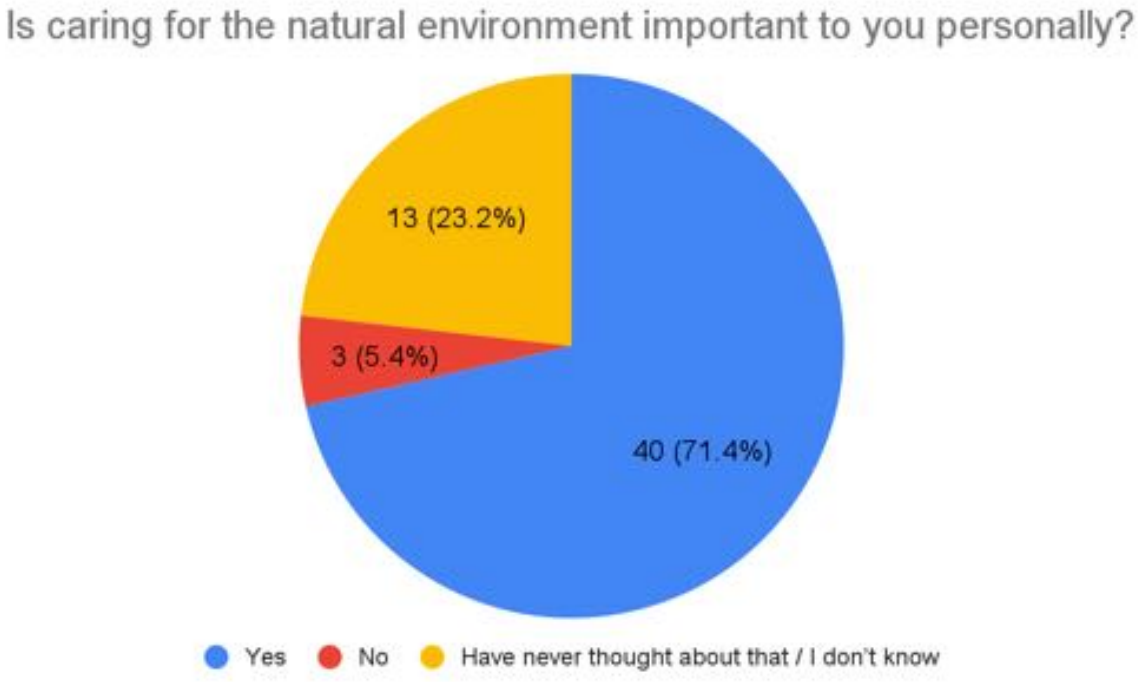
Some respondents recalled anecdotes from teaching, such as telling children they taught that the city of Gyumri was built by craftsmen. For a maker from another region, they recalled that craftspeople would gather on the same street, and going there was the first step in getting an informal craft education. This is no longer the case. Another respondent recounted that a student concealed a cut finger in fear of being stopped from learning.

Attitudes to craft and environmental sustainability

We asked respondents about environmental sustainability. This is because it is both an important global concern, but appears to be a particular concern of many crafts people in other parts of the world, both in their outlook and in how they communicate the narrative of their work. This may also provide an interesting area for future development in education, marketing and personal satisfaction. Craft by its nature is often environmentally friendly due to its small scale of production, undertaken with care, producing goods that are made to last because of their physical and emotional durability.

40 respondents agreed that environmental sustainability was important to them personally, only 3 said no, and 13 didn't know or had not yet thought about it, though when questioned further, most were able to articulate a minimal or reducing impact with their craft.

Gayane Aslanyan demonstrates tonir making



When asked about how they practise their craft in an environmentally sustainable way the general attitude was pragmatic but also nuanced, and reflected a connection to their own environment and a desire to minimise impact, not necessarily specifically in relation to a global carbon footprint, but more of an awareness of the impact of their materials and methods on their local landscape. For example, at least 4 respondents were aware of unavoidable individual impacts of their particular craft on the local environment, such as the noise and heat of metalsmithing, or the noise and dust and impact of mining for stone for khachkar makers. A khachkar maker explained the case for cultural value of craft, despite the negative impact of mining: 'From an educational, cultural and emotional point of view, handicrafts are very important for the environment, but destroying the natural mine and extracting the raw materials from there is harmful for the natural environment.'

9 more respondents specifically referred to material extraction and processing, and how they limit impact through their practices, for example by selecting a good quality and pure clay that doesn't need much post-processing, and which is extracted using non mechanised methods, or by practising responsible forestry when sourcing wood. This intimate knowledge of landscape and environment forms part of the tacit knowledge these makers may share with their students. Scarcity of resources was discussed by one particular wood carver, drawing attention to the responsibility makers have to treat resources with care and respect because Armenia has limited natural resources.

Using natural materials and reducing waste by recycling/reprocessing were the most popular answers to this question (9 and 11 respectively). 5 also mentioned not polluting the environment or avoiding chemical processes where possible. A duduk maker explained that 'for instance when we produce bagpipes, we put the skin of an animal in buttermilk, for cultivating, while

others use chemical substances. Using buttermilk is more complicated, durative and unpleasant, than if we use chemical products. But we prefer the natural way of producing.'

54 respondents use natural materials. (A lace maker wasn't sure, and a knitter does not use natural materials). Wool, clay, wood, cotton, stone and metal are the common natural materials used. For those using natural dyes for their textile crafts the following response from a rug and carpet weaver serves as an example that where available people choose natural or low-impact options, they do: 'for colouring yarn I use only natural colours: rose madder, onion peel, selichrysum, pomegranate peel. Only getting blue colour is a problem, so I use food dyes. Also there is a process of chemical cultivation, I don't like it.' Some, but not all practitioners of stone and metal crafts were aware that natural doesn't always mean low-impact.

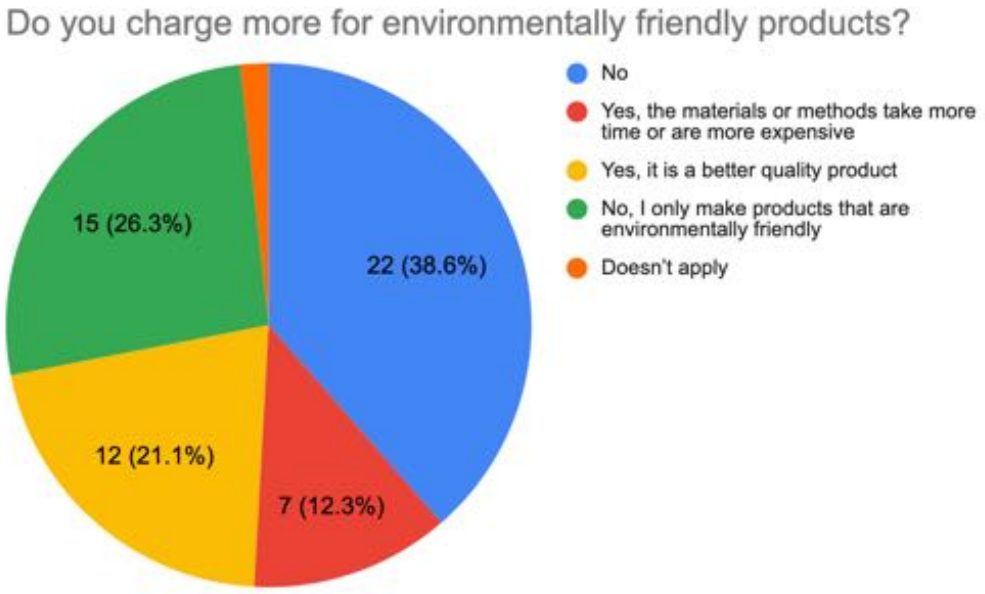
35 respondents use local materials, 8 do not and 12 do so when it is possible, while 1 did not know. Wood, stone and clay are commonly sourced locally while threads (cotton, silk, some wool) are not. Threads come from China, India and Syria. Some stone is imported, for example granite from China and marble from Chelyabinsk, and one woodworker mentioned that some wood comes from Russia.

Regarding energy use, an even split of responses was recorded, with 18 saying they do try to reduce energy use in production, transport and selling (though no one commented directly on transport or selling). 19 said they do not, and for 18, they felt it did not apply. 1 chose not to answer. Many associated hand making with minimal energy use, and commented that their production process was by nature low energy and therefore answering 'no' or 'does not apply' to our question as they perceived no need to reduce energy. A few mentioned using as little electricity as possible by working during the day or preferring hand tools. A blacksmith mentioned using electric energy rather than coal as it is more economical. A ceramist mentioned firing at night, presumably to use the residual heat during the coolest time of the day. Another ceramist mentioned that they would like to reduce their energy use. Overall, there is a fairly robust awareness of the overall (minimal) impact of their practice during the production process.

Craftspeople in Armenia, as in many places, are primarily concerned with their own part of the making process and its impact, but it was positive to see that a close relationship to materials give many makers an understanding of the impact of their extraction. Their scale of production is of course much smaller than industrialised production and cannot really be compared.

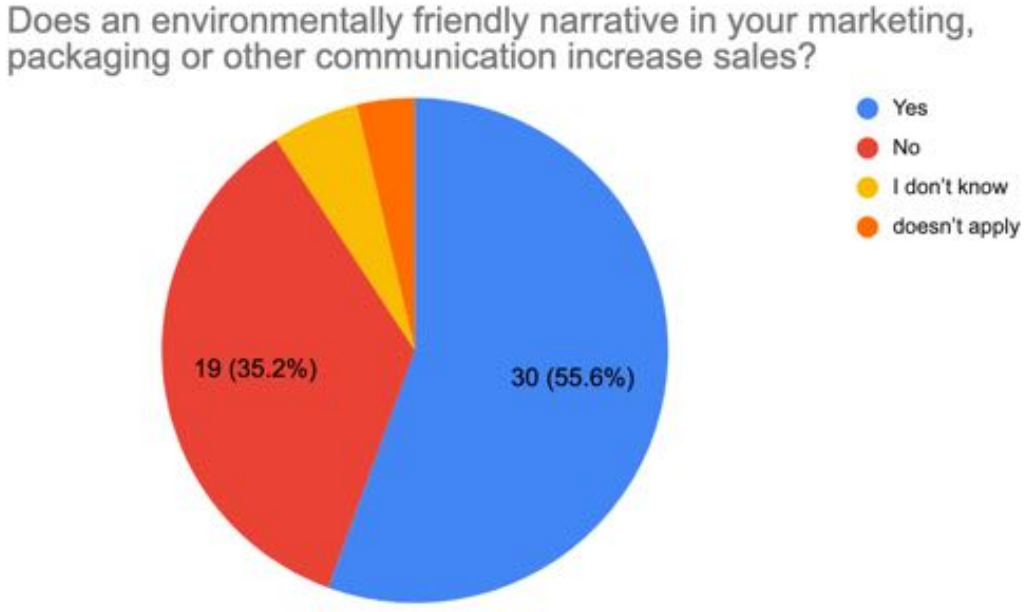
Regarding the narrative that makers use in how they sell their work and tell its story, environmental sustainability is the 'main narrative' for 14 respondents. For 26 other makers, it is 'part of their story' and 11 makers do not mention it to their customers. One qualified it with, 'yes, if they ask' and for 3, it did not apply. It is interesting to note that 11 craftspeople who were involved with MAP answered 'yes' to this question.

Some makers pass on the increased cost associated with environmentally friendly measures, such as natural materials or low energy production, but more than half do not.



Storytelling

30 makers think that telling an environmentally friendly narrative about their work increases sales, while 19 believe it does not. 3 didn't know and only 2 thought it didn't apply.



28 makers said that environmentally friendly products appeal to a specific group. For 20, they appeal to specific groups. For 7, all their customers prefer environmentally friendly products. 12 specifically mentioned tourists or foreigners and 5 suggested that intelligent, educated or competent people choose environmentally friendly products. Others mentioned specific instances such as crafts for children such as cradles, the requirement for food safety or allergies, Armenians living abroad, young people and one thought women would.

Environmental sustainability is important personally to many makers in Armenia. This is mostly manifest as an instinctive awareness of their connection to their surroundings and an intimate relationship with materials. It is intrinsic to many practices. A significant number use it as part of the narrative they tell to their customers, but there is nuance and rationalism that does not suggest greenwashing. There is scope for more complex conversations with makers, who are likely working in a sustainable way, but who could build on this in relation to supply chain transparency and understanding carbon footprint, which are becoming increasingly powerful and important aspects of marketing for craftspeople globally.

Tonirs by Gegham Gharibyan

Perceptions of the Sector

In order to understand how the respondents perceived the craft sector (as opposed to the rest of the study where the focus was on their own individual practice) respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements.

'The market for craft in Armenia is growing'
40 agreed that the market for craft in Armenia is growing. 1 respondent said everything is growing. 3 tempered their answer, indicating there is growth, but it's limited. 1 mentioned that personalities develop. One mentioned technology in relation to growth. 15 disagreed, with one saying that there is no demand. 1 mentioned the covid-19 pandemic has slowed growth. One said the market is growing but the product stagnates. Another described it as a treat amongst others. One thought that the market was growing in soviet times (and presumably is no longer growing).

'Craft is prestigious'
44 agreed that craft is prestigious. 10 disagreed. 1 specified it is prestigious for good craftsmen. 1 didn't know. One described it as a need for humanity. One said it will be good. One said prestige is craft.

'Craft is no longer relevant'
47 think that craft remains relevant. 9 agree that it is no longer relevant. One said it cannot be irrelevant. Craft is limited if there is no art.

'It is unusually for young people to be involved in craft'
35 think it is unusual for young people to be involved in craft. 19 think it is usual. 2 didn't know. One described young people who practice craft as a candle in the darkness.

'Craft is relevant to daily life'
For 52, craft is relevant to their daily life. 4 feel it is not. A silversmith said it is always relevant.

'I can/cannot earn a good living from craft.'
19 feel that they cannot earn a good living from craft. 35 agree that they can earn a good living. One says it is relative. A good master can x 2. Some (5) who agreed said they are earning a 'normal' living. One said that if they can't learn, it is their own fault. 1 said it's impossible to assess if it's a good living. One said making money is a craft itself.

'Craft is a good option for a career'
46 think it is a good option for a career and 6 believe it is not. A ceramist said not all crafts are a good option. A silversmith said the environment and acquaintance are positive and a wood carver said its relative. 2 didn't know. 'Different types of artificial factors are good tools for a career'. One described it as a good career.

'There are no places to sell craft'
18 think there are no places (or limited places) to sell craft. 36 disagree. A blacksmith and a silversmith said there are not enough, a carpet weaver says they don't need to find places to sell, a ceramist hasn't tried. A furniture maker mentioned that in Sisian there are places to sell craft. A wood carver said people need to watch out for places. A Khachkar maker said there are places everywhere in the world. 1said it would be desirable to have narrow professional spaces.

'It is too difficult to find supplies'
37 do not think it is too difficult to find supplies. 18 think it is. 1 mentioned that there are supplies, but good quality supplies are difficult to find. Finding quality clay appears to be an issue for several ceramists, and a furniture maker mentioned good quality wood is scarce. Finding some precious and semi-precious stones is an issue. 1 Khachkar maker said finding supplies is time consuming. Local is not enough.

Other general perceptions by profession / craft

Respondents told us the following about their perception of the sector, including giving more detail to our prompts. These are separated by craft or profession as there are different concerns for certain crafts. Of course they are determined by personal circumstances, age and previous experiences. For many craftspeople, especially older respondents, financial support from the state is suggested as part of the solution to developing the sector, perhaps this is because some of them may have experienced or observed increased state support for culture in the 1960s and 1970s. They also are supportive of educational initiatives, and feel strongly that their craft is part of a national cultural identity, referring to its long history and importance to the nation.

Tonir makers
Respondents had contrasting perceptions. Two respondents believed there was no future for tonir making, with one blaming the rupture of traditional intergenerational knowledge transfer on the soviet period industrialisation and education system, with vocational colleges seen by this maker as ruining traditional crafts. They also thought that there are tonir makers keeping their secrets to themselves and monopolising the remaining trade. The contrasting view is one of enthusiasm and passion despite somewhat challenging circumstances: 'if there were no craft our country couldn't develop'. They suggested the state should encourage artisans. Whilst tonir making doesn't make you rich, you can still live properly. Another told us you have to love the job for the craft to develop, but noting that there is a shortage of women bakers.

Duduk makers
Overall a positive perception that this craft field is in a better condition than it has been. One drew attention to an event in Israel where the Armenian pavilion was one of the best, showing Armenia has 'very advanced craft branches'. Another was encouraged by innovation which bring diverse ideas. However, another said that 'we need to elevate ourselves' and help people to learn about craft as there are 'many things that people don't understand'. A duduk maker's perception was that it is considered dusty work by young people.

Blacksmiths

Mixed but balanced perceptions from the blacksmiths. There is a perception of growth and development but an admission that changing lifestyles where convenience is preferred creates a challenge for blacksmithing, and some worries about demand. However, development is possible, if attention is paid to craftspeople. Respondents brought up taste. While Armenia has advanced blacksmithing from a technical perspective, some respondents think there are ugly and tasteless works being produced. They go on to say that it is much more preferable for works to have poor quality than be tasteless. This is linked to the customer: 'We need a customer with taste to want good things, something must be made that generations will value after 100-150 years.'

Khachkar maker and stone worker

There were suggestions that educational development is required, working with children to develop their imagination and promoting a desire to develop, to create skills and opportunities.

While they were disturbed by the war and pandemic they now have a lot of orders, a bitter double-edged sword of their particular practice.

As a practice that is in demand, there is a general attitude of optimism, and a sense that it is a good thing if others are also doing well: 'This work is just like a chain. If someone's business is getting better, other artisan' will be better as well.' A less experienced maker suggested the opposite, but this is not the consensus. Tourism is seen as an opportunity and locals don't appreciate the craft as much as they could. There is a perception that craft is receiving more funding, and a sense of the cultural value: 'A good master works. Fighting with stone is in our blood.'

Ceramics

Respondents are optimistic about the development of ceramics, with one respondent remarking that the demand for wedding jugs is high. They also referred to the broader context, saying that peace and a strong economy are essential for their growth. Respondents suggested that craft should be an expression of the nation.

They also called for State support at the scientific level. There was a suggestion of establishing a district for craftspeople.

Rug and Carpet

A mixed but generally optimistic impression from carpet and rug weavers. They spoke of their dedication to the craft and the importance of presenting Armenian carpets appropriately in the international market, and drawing on heritage and tradition rather than fashion. There was a sense from most that craft in Armenia is growing, including a healthy interest in carpets and rugs. Several respondents called for educational interventions from a young age to grow the sector and increase quality. One for example wanted to set up a school for boys and others felt that it should be encouraged in schools. One respondent did say that earning enough money is a challenge because Armenians can't afford to pay an appropriate price, but they continue to make for the pleasure of it.

It is interesting that one respondent felt the culture built up during the soviet period was falsely invented and an interest in the true culture is creating the environment for development, calling for private sector support. Conversely another respondent harked back to the soviet era, calling for secure employment in factories. Another called for state support and compulsory education. Peace and a stable growing economy were considered prerequisites.

Fine metalwork

The metalsmiths told us about the great taste of Armenian artisans and the potential of the sector, with many people showing an interest in craft, and artisans feeling respected and praised. However they also expressed that the overall economic situation is very challenging and state support, at least to properly resource craft education, should be increased. There are places to learn craft, but this could be improved and expanded with funding as current state funding is inadequate.

Wood carving, furniture making

For those working in wood there was a sense of loss at techniques or ways of working that are no longer practised. However, many remarked that there was growth up until the pandemic and that hopefully there will be more growth soon as Armenian artisans are 'the best'. State support, or private support and reduced taxation and 'freedom' were suggested to facilitate development, as well as educational interventions to train 'real specialists'. A respondent noted that officials could do with learning more about craft. One respondent commented that technical abilities are generally good, but 'semantically', there is room for development.

Lace making and embroidery

There is a positive sense from the lace makers and embroiderers that their craft is in a really positive, healthy position with lots of interest and motivation to learn and practice. Some mention that materials are generally available (though this is contradicted by others at other points in the study). Some are calling for the professionalisation of the craft, and others point to the benefit of it as an amateur pastime with its own cultural and personal value that is more important than using it to earn a living. Some do mention the challenge of a limited demand and perceptions of value, but the overall attitude seems most optimistic amongst those who use needles and threads.

Knitting

Respondents were unsure about the sector, with some noticing decline due to a lack of demand, in part due to cheaper imported products: They appreciate elevated craft but prefer cheaper products' or are unable to afford high quality craft.

Key Themes & Recommendations

Storytelling

One of the most powerful, yet indirect outcomes of this research was the rich and personal narratives about craft practices that were observed during the fieldwork. The human and emotional aspects of storytelling about craft give it a cultural and personal value that cannot be replicated. Telling these stories is an essential part of educating the general public about craft - it goes beyond technical and material requirements. Enabling craftspeople to have opportunities to tell their stories and be in control of how they are told comes highly recommended as a way to support and develop the craft sector.

Some craftspeople are able to articulate their story very clearly, especially those who have been part of targeted programmes like the MAP, demonstrating that they can work. Supporting other craftspeople to better tell their stories for both local and international audiences, particularly those outside the main tourist areas could be helpful to them.

Business practices & the internet

Our interviews revealed limited adaptation to circumstances during the covid-19 pandemic. Overall income dropped and craft sales income dropped for many respondents. Sales venues and materials sourcing did not change much during the pandemic, nor did product ranges, for the majority of respondents. Therefore, building resilience and enabling adaptation may help those running small craft businesses in the future.

One way to do this might be increasing confidence and building on existing skills in online communication to help develop and continue to share their craft practice, even during times of conflict and other difficulties, in the future. It is possible to support craftspeople, many of whom have a relatively conservative mindset, to adapt aspects of their practice. They may find it to be even interesting and pleasurable. There may also be other benefits from increased communication and community building that may be helpful. The internet presents opportunities for craftspeople to tell their stories. The increased access to information can also be empowering, keeping craftspeople informed. This can be supported through learning within families, promoting intergenerational learning, and is more likely to be successful if undertaken slowly and with a practical emphasis over a period of time rather than as a one-off activity (this is how our respondents learnt their own craft). In many cases family members are already engaged in various aspects of craft businesses.

Considering the impact of the pandemic and war on tourism and the physical retail environment, it may be useful to individual craftspeople to learn specifically how they can use the internet specifically for online selling and online communication to facilitate sales. 40% of respondents are already doing this, but it is still a relatively small part of overall sales. Growing and developing this area has great potential that can be seen in craft communities in other parts of the world. Both teaching more people general internet skills (internet use is already fairly high

but not complete), and developing e-commerce (including payment methods) and communication skills further is appropriate. This is a form of direct selling that craftspeople themselves or their families can be in control of, and developing skills in this area gives craftspeople more options. This however does require time, which most respondents understand.

Respondents would like specific professional help or services in relation to e-commerce:

- web designers to create and maintain websites,
- marketing or advertising specialists to help them sell their work,
- someone to manage their social media profiles as they have no time or limited interest and skills (this might be family),
- product photography,
- online selling,
- general help to manage an online presence and communication.

Making

Technical competency amongst craftspeople is generally good. However, some craftspeople might be interested in learning new techniques (dependent on the nature of the craft practice) for their own interest and development. Very few respondents had implemented new technical things they had learnt over the last 5 years.

To encourage supply chain transparency and give craftspeople more control over their material sourcing, for some crafts it may be appropriate to develop skills and knowledge in local material preparation such as yarn spinning and natural dyeing and material collection for ceramics. This could be a form of skills sharing or peer learning. In woodcraft, encouraging people to develop and tell stories of responsible forestry practices (perhaps through peer learning) for example could be helpful. Some respondents indicated that sourcing wood is becoming more difficult. Materials sourcing is currently dependent on local shops. Keeping suppliers like this in the conversation is also important to developing a sustainable craft sector.

Regarding digital design and making technologies, there is awareness, but there is limited interest. For master craftspeople who are interested in developing their work, support to use appropriate facilities as a way to enhance their craft would be useful, however, avoiding scenarios where people are using these technologies for the production of low quality souvenirs with low cultural value is essential. There is also a high cost to some CAD/CAM technologies that may make them unsuitable in many cases.

Business Development Training

Regarding business practices, strength seems to lie with most craftspeople in their making rather than in their ability as a business person, therefore it is recommended that those skills around business and marketing are offered to support crafts people.

A key question for development agencies to ask when designing interventions or training is whether people are interested in developing their practice or their business. The professional development module developed by Rachel Darbourne as part of the Crafting Futures programme in Armenia, could be an appropriate intervention in the informal training environment for craftspeople who are interested in learning more about business (and in the VET sector for which it was originally developed). This module is approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport for use in the VET sector and was piloted by staff at 3 VET colleges[6] in Armenia. Material is available from the The National Centre for Vocational education.

Teaching and learning

The study focused predominantly on craftspeople with informal learning and teaching experiences. From what we learnt from our respondents, a number of themes and recommendations have emerged in relation to teaching practice and learning experiences.

Key themes identified in relation to how informal learning takes place include pleasure, love and bonding; watching and helping; being assisted by the master; pragmatic approaches to learning skills (templates, steps etc); observation; learning through making; taking a student-centred approach; and, proximity and motivation. In relation to attracting young people to craft practices who may not come from a crafting family, a key aspect could be initial exposure or proximity to craft practices, including for some, seeing people earn money from their craft. There was a moderate interest from young people reported by respondents. Patience, kindness and positivity are key traits for successful informal teaching. Practice and self-motivation are key traits for informal learning.

The informal learning environment is as one would expect, far less restricted in terms of time and taught content than the formal sector. Time was identified as a key factor that differentiates formal and informal modes of learning. It is possible that a more flexible and material/craft-specific attitude to time (duration and frequency of sessions for example) could help students learn more effectively. A relaxed sense of time seems to be an important characteristic. Our informal teachers described a student centred-approach that enabled choice, and for the student to work at their own pace. An informal learning experience can be described as typically regular but without a fixed structure. Flexibility and openness on the part of teachers gives students a positive experience.

Informal learning gave our respondents craft making skills but also confidence, patience and pride, peacefulness, wisdom, integrity, modesty, honesty and many other positive characteristics. It can promote a positive relationship to nature, a positive mental outlook and a sense of pleasure or satisfaction. For many it is a vocation and way of life. It is also part of the preservation and development of cultural identities and a way that human relationships can be successfully built, and especially, intergenerational relationships. Respondents saw their teaching as a way to pass on their skills and with it national and cultural identities, many saw it

[6] Panos Terlemezyan State Fine Arts College, Lori Regional State College and Romanos Melikyan State Music College staff members participated in training and piloting of the module in 2021.

as a moral duty. In return they get a sense of satisfaction and pleasure, develop human relationships and a sense of pride.

Most of the respondents are teaching. For those who are interested in passing their skills on, but aren't teaching, the main reason is that people are not interested. This could be addressed by connecting motivated young people to master craftspeople, or exposing more young people to craft making in order to reveal those who might be motivated to learn. Other issues include the craft being very physically demanding so students struggle to persist (eg. metalworking) or the learning experience could be very different from prior experience. There could be an honest conversation and/or mentoring for both teacher and student to make expectations clear. Craftspeople could be supported to better communicate the immense value from learning a craft.

Environmental sustainability

While the concept of environmental sustainability was quite strange for some respondents, most were able to articulate the minimal impact that their craft has on the environment, with some demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the impact of material extraction and production. They have a strong connection to and understanding of their local environment.

Whether craftspeople are using environmental sustainability as part of the story they tell about their work is a more mixed picture that could be further developed to help craftspeople to tell their customers why traditional craft has cultural, social *and* environmental value. This will likely be an area of increasing interest for customers. There is scope for more complex conversations with makers to help them emphasise their environmental credentials, and to learn more about the complexity of the issue, for example supply chain transparency, carbon footprint, and regenerative approaches, supplementing their passionate and human advocacy for their craft.

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